

# GOSPEL WORKERS MINISTRY

SERMON OF THE MONTH

## THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

*September 2022*

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I'd like to begin this morning by reading a short paragraph from **Christ's Object Lessons, page 325**, "Christ on the Mount of Olives had spoken to His disciples of His second advent to the world. He had specified certain signs that were to show when His coming was near and had bidden His disciples watch and be ready. (**Are you watching? Things are happening my dear friends, and prophecy is fast fulfilling. If you haven't noticed, America is divided today as never before, and the only solution in the minds of the powers that be is to impose force and exert authoritarian power. Truly, Isaiah 59:14 has come to pass where it says, "Judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity, or an 'impartial distribution of justice' cannot enter."** Read Isaiah 59 when you have the opportunity, it's very apropos for our time.) Again He repeated the warning, watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh. Then He showed what it means to watch for His coming. (**What does that mean, do you suppose? Now listen carefully for the answer in this next sentence.**) The time is to be spent, not in idle waiting, but in diligent working. This lesson He taught in the parable of the talents."

To be idle, especially at this time in earth's history, is to be unemployed, and as workers in the Lord's vineyard that's a very



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dangerous position to be in right now, because to be idly waiting is to delay the Lord's coming, and ultimately to lose our own soul if we don't wake up and be about our Father's business. You see, if we can hasten the day of the Lord's return by diligent working as it says in **2 Peter 3:12**, then we can also prolong it by our idleness, can't we? If there ever was a time to put it in gear and step on the gas it's now, and not to just sit in neutral and rev the engine, because time is very, very short; I can't stress that enough, and we already know that the close of probation is going to catch the majority off guard, and hopefully that won't be any of us. And so, like never before, we all need to be praying that God will help us improve our talents and show us where they will do the most good as we are now approaching the final hours of this world's history.

This month I've chosen to take a little break, we all need to do that from time to time, and dust off a sermon I did some time ago dealing with the parable of the talents, because I think the information in it will be of benefit to us and perhaps help us to think about what we are doing or not doing to fulfill the Lord's plan for our lives and the lives of those who might hear us. But before we begin, I'd like to have a short prayer and ask that the Holy Spirit might convict our hearts to action.

Every summer when school was out my family and I would all pile into the car and head for Bass Lake, Indiana. That's where my grandparents lived, and I couldn't wait to get there. They had a nice little cottage on the lake, very ornate, beautifully decorated. I can still remember, in my mind's eye, seeing that little house—yellow and white. My grandparents were partially German and from what I know about German people, they usually have very neat, decorative type homes and this is the way this was here.

And I can remember also, just above the front door, as you go into the house, there was a sign that said The Shangri La. I don't know what Shangri La means, but to me as a child, it meant paradise, because that's what I thought about when we were headed to my grandparents' place. As we all piled into the car, me being the youngest of five, was always stuck in the back seat right crunched in the middle of my older brothers and sisters. I always wanted a window seat. Did you grow up that way fighting for a window? Anyway, as I'm sitting in the back seat, we're headed down the road to Bass Lake, Indiana, and here I am about eight years old, and I'm thinking, I want to get to paradise and I want to get there fast. I can't wait to be able to jump in the water, to play with my cousins and friends and family members. I really looked forward to it.

As we got into the car and we started heading down the road, ten or fifteen minutes later I'd say, Dad, are we almost there? And he'd say, Just around the next bend, son. But there seemed to be another bend, and another bend, and another bend, and it seemed like we were never going to get there.

And isn't that the way we feel about the second coming of Christ, sometimes? Is He ever going to come? How many more band aides can they put on the economy? How much longer will those four angels continue to hold the four winds until God's people are sealed in their foreheads? Is Jesus ever going to come?

Do you know what it says in **Isaiah 49:16**? It says that we have been graven on the palms of His hands. He's not going to forget you, He's not going to forget me. I think of John 14:1-3. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Have you ever wondered how those verses could harmonize with the idea that you go straight to heaven when you die? The Bible says when Jesus comes then He's going to receive us unto Himself. What sense would there be if we're already there with Him?

“A little longer, and we shall see the King in His beauty. A little longer, and He will wipe all tears from our eyes. A little longer, and He will present us ‘faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.’ **Jude 1:24**. . . . When He gave the signs of His coming He said, ‘When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.’” **The Desire of Ages, pg. 632**

Friends, we are not living during the time when the signs of Jesus' return are just beginning. They're almost all fulfilled. Jesus is coming and it's only going to be a little longer. But how many more bends in the road there will be before that happens, at least to some extent, depends upon you and upon me. Now is the time that we are to cooperate with God in earnest because He is anxious to come and to take us home. You think God is more anxious to come than we are for Him to come? Absolutely. And He wants to add the finishing touch to our characters while there's still time.

I hope that it is your prayer that this service today will help to accomplish that, because aren't we here for the purpose of becoming grounded and settled into the truth so that we can't be moved? Isn't it to bring us to the point that we would rather die than knowingly commit a wrong act? Isn't it to bring us into the unity of the faith and to encourage us to remain faithful unto the very end? That's why we're here.

You know, brothers and sisters, we need to realize our potential as we cooperate with God in the increase of the talents that He has given, because doesn't He expect some kind of return for His goods? Absolutely. He now only wants us to be ready, but He wants those for whom we are laboring to be ready also. God doesn't want us to be stuck in neutral as we are waiting for Him to return. He would rather us put it in drive and step on the gas because time is short. What are we doing with the talents God has given us?

When Jesus was on the Mount of Olives He talked to His disciples about the time when He would come back to this earth. And He talked about certain signs that would take place to show when His coming was going to be near. And in the latter part of **Matthew 24** He told His disciples to watch and pray. And again, in **Matthew 25:13** He repeated once again that warning as He gave the parable of the ten virgins.

And so that's where I would like to start this morning, **Matthew 25:13**, this repeated warning that Jesus gave to His disciples. Jesus said, “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”

After giving this warning Jesus told another parable that would show what it means to watch for His coming, and what we're supposed to do until He arrives. The time is not to be spent in idle waiting. It's to be spent in diligent working. This is the lesson that He taught in the parable of the talents recorded in **verses 14-30**. And this is the parable I would like to study with you today. Because as important as it is for us to know and believe and understand that Jesus is coming soon, it's really more important that we be ready when He does come.

First of all, I think it would be good for us to define just what a parable is. A parable is an illustration, there are object lessons. It's like a bridge that leads the hearer from the seen to the unseen, from the earthly to the heavenly. It is a comparison of two different things. It's also a way to drive home an important point, or a moral lesson, or a religious principle. If you think about it, the parables of Jesus have a hidden spiritual meaning somewhere tucked into that parable. And those spiritual meanings reveal truth to those who will accept it, but at the same time it was concealed from those who would reject it.

That's the way it was two thousand years ago as Jesus told His parables, and it isn't any different today. Today many people still don't understand the spiritual lessons that Jesus taught in His parables because spiritual things are spiritually discerned. You have to be spiritual in order to have a desire or a capacity to understand the spiritual. And how do we become spiritual? By accepting Jesus Christ into our life and partaking of His spirit. That's how it's done.

So, let's begin by reading **Matthew 25:14**, the beginning of this parable of the talents.

Jesus said, "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country," Now the first thing I want you to notice is that Jesus almost always these types of phrases to introduce His parables. The kingdom of heaven is as a man, or the kingdom of heaven is likened unto. That's what He said in **Matthew 25:1**. Before He told the parable of the ten virgins He said, "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins." What did Jesus mean when He said these kinds of things? Why did He always say that the kingdom of heaven is like, or as, whatever it was?

In other words, this parable can be likened to, or compared to, the experience or the process that God's people are going to go through on their way to obtain the kingdom. That's why He said what He said. And so, there's something in these parables that's going to help us to understand what must I do to be saved and prepare us for His soon coming.

"For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; [or depending upon his particular skill] and straightway [immediately] took his journey."

This man traveling into a far country represents Jesus. He's the one who came down here to this earth, He became our substitute, and not only our substitute, but our example of how to live. And then He departed and went to a far country. Heaven's a far country.

Speaking of the heroes of our faith in **Hebrews 11:16**, it says, "but now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly." And so, Jesus went to a better country, He went to an heavenly country. But before He went, He called His own servants and delivered unto them His goods. Who are these servants that He delivered His goods to? Us. His disciples. His followers. We are His servants. When we accept His sacrifice in our behalf, we become slaves of righteousness. That's what a servant is in the Bible, it's a slave. Slaves of righteousness as it says in **Romans 6:18**. In **1 Corinthians 6:20** "For ye are bought with a price." Isn't it a slave that's bought with a price? We're all slaves of righteousness.

**1 Peter 1:18, 19** "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed [ransomed, freed from the enemy that held you captive, or bought] ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, [the character of Jesus is not a corruptible thing, that's how we were redeemed] as silver and gold, from your vain

conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

As the disciples of Christ, why have we been redeemed? That’s the question. Why did He redeem us? Just because He loved us? Yes. But what are we to do now that we are redeemed? We are to love Him. And how do we love Him? By keeping His commandments, by taking on His character, and preaching the gospel.

As Christ’s church, haven’t we been redeemed for service? The true object of the Christian life is ministry. All of us are ministers to one another and to other people. The law of service is what binds us to God and to our fellow man.

According to the parable, some time before Jesus ascended to heaven, He delivered unto His servants His goods. In other words, He gave them something that was to be put into service for Him. This wasn’t just some kind of inheritance that Jesus gave that was to be spent any way they saw fit on frivolous things or whatever. These gifts were entrusted and they were to be expanded upon. The Lord expects returns from His goods.

Even though the talents in this parable are spoken of as a sum of money, spiritually speaking they represent something else. Remember, a parable is given for the purpose of carrying the listeners from the earthly to the heavenly. That was the purpose of Christ’s parables; from the literal to the spiritual.

Before Jesus went into a far country, He didn’t literally give His disciples cold hard cash. He didn’t give them real money and say, Here, invest this for me until I get back. He actually gave them something far more valuable than money. If you’ll turn with me to **John 20**, I’ll show you what I mean. **John 20:19**, “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews [**oh, you mean they weren’t worshipping on that first Sunday in honor of the resurrection? No, they were scared. They were there for fear of the Jews. And then**], came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.” Wouldn’t you have loved to have been there? I imagine we would be very glad, especially after being so disappointed when He was crucified. They didn’t think they would see Him again.

**Verse 21:** “Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.”

As we’ll see in a minute, Jesus was even now delivering a few drops of those goods that He said that He would give to His servants.

Go also to **Luke 24:49**. The context of **Luke 24** is the same as what we just read in **John 20** only it’s giving just a few different details here in Luke’s gospel. In fact, if you want to kind of get the context, look at **verse 36**. “And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.” And they thought it was some kind of a spirit and they were afraid. Jesus said again, Look at My hands, My side—It’s Me. And so, the context is the same.

Now when you get down to **verse 49** it says, “And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: **[by breathing on them the Holy Spirit, as we read in John’s gospel]** but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued **[invested, clothed]** with power from on high.”

A record of this same conversation can also be found in **Acts 1:4, 5**. “And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” In fact, we know that just a few days afterward came the day of Pentecost.

**Ephesians 4:8**: “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, **[in other words, when Jesus ascended to heaven, He took with Him those who were captive by the grave and by death. Remember those few that were raised just after He was and they went back to heaven with Him? But what else did He do?]** and gave gifts unto men.” What were these gifts? Look at **verse 11**. “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; **[for what purpose?]** for the perfecting of the saints **[for the growth of the saints, perfection can’t take place without growth]**, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying **[building up]** of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

Now let me ask you a question. Have we arrived? Are all God’s people in unity today? Have we all made it to the full stature of Jesus Christ? No. And so the gifts of the Spirit are still available to God’s church in these last days. Every one of them.

Before Jesus ascended, He delivered His goods, but the fullness of it was not received until after He ascended. And so, the talents that Christ entrusted to His church represent especially the gifts that He imparted by the Holy Spirit.

The talents also represent some other things, but for now I want to zero in on the gifts of the Spirit and how God would have us recognize and improve on these gifts. Because according to the parable, that’s what the man traveling into the far country expected of his servants. In fact, before we go and talk about the gifts of the Spirit let’s go back to that parable in **Matthew 25** and finish reading this.

**Matthew 25:16** “Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. **[So he doubled his money, he was a good man.]** And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. **[Good job.]** But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money.” It’s interesting that the one who received the smallest gift was the one who left his talent unimproved. He probably thought, Oh this little talent that I have been given is so insignificant, I think I’ll just sit on it. It’s no big deal. This little bit that I can do really won’t make that much difference anyway. Let the one who has more talents than I have do the work. There are a lot of people like that today. When we are asked to do something in the service of Christ, whether it’s having a public prayer, or whether it’s giving a short testimony, or whether it’s teaching the class, or whatever it is, many people say, I don’t think so. Let so and so do it. They can do a better job than I can do. So why don’t you just ask them. They can do better than I can. You know, when we do this kind of thing, we’re actually digging a hole and burying our talent. Even if we have just one little talent we’re just digging a hole and we’re not improving upon that. We need to understand that it’s the little things in life that prepare us for the bigger things to come.

Keep your finger in Matthew and go to **Luke 16:10**. “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.” It’s the little actions repeated that form habits, habits develop character, and character determines our eternal destiny. So, the little things are important, the little things that we either do or don’t do, the little choices we make in one direction or the other is going to eventually determine where we’re going to end up.

**Matthew 25:19**: “After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.” What are we talking about here? When the Lord comes back. It’s then when the rewards will be given.

**Verse 20**: “And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strowed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strowed: thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. **[For at least with interest, that he could have done that much]** Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The point I’m bringing out here is, these talents especially represent the gifts of the Spirit that God has given us. Let’s say we receive a gift and instead of improving upon that gift we just don’t do anything with it. We will eventually lose our ability to use that talent. The Lord says He’ll take and give it to somebody else. Those who drift along carrying no responsibility in the service of Christ will end up alongside of those who did evil. And so don’t allow your talent to be taken away and given to somebody else, but rather be among those who are receiving more.

And so, what’s the moral of the story here? Let’s boil it down. #1 The talents, however few, are to be put to use. #2 The most important question is not how much have I received, but what am I doing with what I have? #3 If we don’t use it, we lose it. And if we lose it, we lose a great deal.

I’ll tell you a little story I heard several years ago. It was about a professor who traveled worldwide, and he spoke about whatever the subject was that he was an expert in. He had a chauffer that took him everywhere he went. This chauffer sat in his meetings for months, years maybe. One day the chauffer came to the professor and said, “You know, I could present that subject as good as you can, I’ve heard it so many times. The professor said, “You know what? At the next meeting I’m going to let you do that. I am going to pretend that I am the chauffer and I want you to pretend you are the professor.” And that’s what they did. The fellow got up front and he presented an hour subject, did a beautiful job. But at the end of the meeting, something unexpected happened, something that didn’t happen before. Somebody in the audience raised their hand and wanted to ask a question and he didn’t know the answer to that question. All he knew was what that professor had said, and he knew how to give that

perfectly, but he didn't know how to answer that question. But he did know what to say. When the question was asked, he said, "That question is so simple I'm going to let my chauffeur answer it for you."

I think that makes a point. We really have to know what we believe and why we believe it, and not just have a knowledge, or to repeat what we've heard. We want to know for ourselves what we believe.

Now, let's go to **1 Corinthians 12** and we'll read a little about the gifts of the Spirit. **1 Corinthians 12:1**: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities [**a variety**] of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, [**what would you say this is talking about here? Ministries. There are different ways that we can minister to other people. We are not all in one little mold.**] but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." What would operations be? Different ways of operating, or working, for the Lord. Different kinds of activities.

**Verse 7**: "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; [**What do you suppose that refers to? Intellect? The word of wisdom. If you have the word of wisdom, you have the ability to articulate the truth to someone else so they can understand it and grab hold; that's a gift.**] to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;" [**what is this? The word of knowledge is the ability to explain in an orderly way so that somebody can grab hold of the truth. That's a gift.**]

**Verse 9**: "To another faith by the same Spirit; [**Aren't we all supposed to have faith? Yes, but this is talking about extraordinary faith. Some people just have that extraordinary faith. Children! Except as ye become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom.**"] to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;" What does gifts of healing mean? A good nurse. We're not necessarily talking about supernatural healing. Some people just have a knack and they know how to make you well. They know the natural remedies, the herbs. They know what to do and what you should take to make you well. That would be a gift of healing. Some of the things that we can expect to happen before Jesus comes back. Look at the Day of Pentecost and the different things that were accomplished. He told His disciples, Look, you don't have to worry about these serpents and these different things; I give you power over these. But we don't really see these supernatural manifestations in these last days so much. The reason we don't see so many miraculous, supernatural, physical healings today is because God has given us a health message to present to the people so that they can do their part in getting well, in healing that way. It doesn't mean that people cannot be supernaturally healed. But even there, the Bible is specific as to how we should do that. "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders." (**James 5:14**) So gifts of healing.

**Verse 10**: "To another the working of miracles;" Again, what kind of miracles are we talking about here. Most people when they think of a miracle they think of some literal manifestation, some miraculous thing takes place. But it doesn't necessarily have to be that way. If you know how to lead a person to Christ so that they can be born again, that's a miracle. You can be a miracle worker in that way. These things are gifts. And we need to look at it in a spiritual as well as a literal aspect as we're going through these things.



Last part of **verse 10**: “to another prophecy;” What does that mean? If you look up the word it doesn’t necessarily mean that somebody knows how to tell the future, like when you think of a prophet as somebody who foretells. It’s simply an inspired speaker. I’ve heard lots of inspired speakers over the years and in that sense, they have the gift of prophecy, to speak forth the word of God.

**(Verse 10 continued)**: “to another discerning of spirits;” I know people who, it seems like, as soon as they meet someone, they have the ability to tell whether that person has the spirit of Christ or whether they are moved by another spirit. I don’t have that ability unless they’re doing something obvious. I don’t see where a person is coming from until I get to know them a little better. But some people, right off the bat, they can just tell. Discerning truth from error. Discerning spirits.

**(Verse 10 continued)**: “to another divers kinds of tongues [**languages**]; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.”

**1 Corinthians 12:27**: “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles,” What is an apostle? A lot of these things are mysterious to a lot of people. We don’t have apostles today, do we? What would be a definition of an apostle today? What did the apostles do in the New Testament time? They preached, but they were the ones who traveled around establishing new churches. Those were the apostles, that was their work that God gave them to do.

And then next it says, “secondarily prophets,” **[Again, an inspired speaker. This would be more like a minister or a pastor.]** thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps.” That was an interesting one. If you go to the concordance, you’ll find another word that defines what it means here. It said, relief. Relief. It’s a gift to know how to bring relief to people. Helping hands. It’s a help. It’s a gift. Relieving people.

**(Verse 27 continued)**: “governments,” Here’s another one that I looked up that was kind of interesting to me. If you go to the concordance once again, it means pilotage or a pilot. Somebody who knows how to steer the church in the right direction. That’s a gift. Organization. A lot of people don’t know who to do that, or they try to do it. They don’t have that gift and they mess things up.

**(Verse 27 continued)**: “diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? **[No]** are all prophets? **[No]** are all teachers? **[No]** are all workers of miracles? **[No]** Have all the gifts of healing? **[No]** do all speak with tongues?” No. I have talked to people and most of them that are involved with their form of tongues, the gibberish that nobody understands, they believe that you must do this in order to be saved. You cannot go to heaven unless you speak unless you speak in tongues. That is a salvational issue with a lot of people. Maybe just to give you a short experience I had not long after I became a Christian. My first wife had some friends, and we went to visit them. They were Pentecostal type Christians. They had a pickup truck and a camper. They asked us if we wanted to go to some meetings with them and we went with them to their Wednesday night church meeting and boy, did I get my eyes open! It was very subdued at first. They had the piano and different kinds of instruments and things began to build and before I knew it people were facing the wall and doing all kinds of things, weird things, and sounding strange. This is my first experience to anything like this, I never knew anything about it. But right away the Lord gave me enough sense to know that there’s something wrong here, this is not right. But we sat through it and after it was over we got back into their vehicle. I was up front in the cab with him and my wife and his wife were in the back in the camper. And so he had a captive audience all the way

home. He was one of these fellows who were convinced that you must speak in tongues if you're going to be saved. And if you haven't spoken in tongues, you are not saved. On the way home he wanted to try to get me to speak in tongues. How foolish I thought this whole thing was. But he kept on me, trying to explain about tongues and how important it is and if you really want to go to heaven you must speak in tongues and have I don't that yet. I said, "No." He just kept after me and kept after me and pretty soon he laid his hand on my shoulder and said a little prayer while he was driving down the road. Really, I got so tired of him bugging me that I just spoke jibberish and the guy almost went off the road he was so excited. When he got to their home, he just couldn't wait to tell my wife and his wife that I spoke in tongues and now I'm saved. But I thought, How stupid this is! I'm so glad that the Lord protected me in my ignorance. You know, I wouldn't do that today, but back then I didn't know any better.

But obviously, as you read through this stuff, everybody does not have the gift of tongues, just like everybody's not an apostle or a teacher or anything else.

Let's continue on here. **Verse 31**. Listen to what it says, this is very important. "But covet earnestly the best gifts:" Some gifts are natural, and some gifts are acquired, else he would not say covet or desire the best gifts. If we want a certain gift that is mentioned in the Bible we can acquire that gift if we put forth the effort. If we want to be a teacher and we're not used to teaching, we start to study, and we get up in front of people and we start teaching. It's difficult at first, but after a while you get used to it, you get experience, and viola, you're a teacher. And this is the way the gifts are. Some people have a natural ability to teach, or a natural ability to speak in another language, or whatever. Anybody can do it if they put forth the effort, and so covet the best gifts.

**Verse 31** continued: "and yet show I unto you a more excellent way." What is that excellent way? If you follow on through the context, what is the next chapter? Love! That's the more excellent way.

Let's just read the first three or four verses. **1 Corinthians 13:1**: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." I know you have known people, and maybe you know people today who have the "gift of gab." They can speak eloquently; they have the gift of speech. But if they don't employ that gift in God's service, what good is it? If it isn't motivated by love, what good is it in the end? It's wasted.

**Verse 2**: "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." I know people that could put me to shame with their knowledge of the Bible and be able to recall chapter and verse, and all that kind of thing, and yet without love being the motivating force behind that gift or that knowledge that they have in the light of eternity, it's worth nothing.

You think of the secular world and people go to school; they go to college. If they go for a couple of years, they get an associate degree. If they go for four years, they get a bachelor's degree. If they go five years, they get a master's degree. And then they can go on to be a professor or a doctor or whatever. These people are improving to the highest degree that they are capable of. If people in the world can do that, as Christians, shouldn't we do the same? We should do everything possible to reach the highest degree of perfection. And that place that you arrive at may not be as high as somebody else, but it doesn't matter. God's looking at you, and where you are to be and where you can come up to. It's all done for divine service; that's what it's all about. We're not trying to educate ourselves or improve our talents so that people can look at us and say, My, isn't he wonderful! Doesn't he know a lot! That

doesn't matter. It's just for the service of Christ and to uplift Him. This is the education that will endure unto eternal life. If we only have a goal to make it this high, we're never going to go past the goal. It's better to set that goal higher than you think you can reach, because you're always striving. That's what this life's all about. That's what sanctification is all about. It's a constant striving to be more like Christ. "A character formed according to the divine likeness is the only treasure that we can take from this world to the next." (**Christ's Object Lessons, pg. 332**) We're not taking these old bodies; aren't you thankful? We're going to get new ones. No pain, no aches, no gray hair, no feebleness, no getting tired; all gone! The things that we attain in this life we will be rewarded for. Some people are going to have more of a reward when they get to heaven than other people. Nobody will be unhappy, and we'll all know that God is fair, and He has given us what we deserve. Even being there we won't deserve it because we don't deserve the sacrifice that was made for us. But as far as our attainments in this life, as far as the rewards that we're going to get, everyone is going to get in proportion to the effort that they put forth. So it's not enough just to have good intentions and think about what we ought to do, we actually have to put it in practice, we have to put it in action.

And so we see here that the gifts of the spirit, or the Lord's goods that He gives to us, not only further His cause, but by their improvement our characters will receive the stamp of God's approval. And that's what we all want. And then He will be able to say to us, and to those for whom we labored, just like He said to the man that had the five talents, and the two, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." **Matthew 25:21**