

New York City is facing attack. We don't know who, when, how many. Those in charge know you - that you have what it takes to find out. You agree. A dark night and a row boat and you're behind enemy lines. You're finding out the who, the when, the how many. But before you can get to safety, you're found out. You're about to be hung. But first, your last words. You're Nathan Hale, so what do you say? "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." Sends patriotic chills up and down the spine.

Christ and his church are facing attack. The people around you are under attack and attacking each other - lying to each other, brainwashing each other. Hearts are being broken and lives are being lost to hell. You have ... with Christ and his church you have the healing, the hope, the truth people around you need. So Christ and his church call you to step in and step up. What do you do? While you're wondering, you hear voices. Some calling you to play it safe. Some calling you to be bold, to be bold with Jesus. What do you say? Can you hear yourself: "I only regret that I have but one life to give for my Jesus"?

If so, you're in tune with the apostles who put their lives on the line to share Jesus so we can have Jesus. You're in tune with Paul who said: "**In view of God's mercy, offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.**" Yes, if that's the way you're thinking, you're in tune with Jesus and his parable, in tune with the master and the first two of his servants.

Those first two servants hear their master's call. They understand the talents, the treasure, the resources he puts in their hands. They understand it's not theirs to keep for themselves. It's not theirs to blow off. It's not theirs to toy around with when it's comfortable and convenient for them. They understand that what the master has given to them belongs to their master, that he has given it to them for a purpose, and he is serious about his purpose. He's coming back to take account - to take account of what they do with the talent, the treasure, the everything he puts in their hands and hearts.

So the servant with five talents takes his five talents and at once he puts them to work. The servant with two talents - it didn't matter that he had less - he had two talents to work with, so he put them to work.

And when the master returned, what did he say to the first servant? **“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!”** And what did he say to the second servant? That second servant didn't have what the first servant had; he didn't do what the first servant did. But he was faithful with what he had. So what did the master say? **“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!”**

Won't it be great to hear that? But he won't be saying that to everybody. Jesus' parable has a third servant. That third servant couldn't be bothered with what his master called him to do. He couldn't be bothered with the talent entrusted to him. Instead he buried it. He buried it and went off and did his own thing. Why? Oh, he had his excuses, but mostly he blamed his master for expecting something of him. He couldn't say “no” to his master so he lived “no.” He ignored his master and he made himself feel good with excuses.

Where do you see yourself in Jesus' parable? I'd like to be one of those first two servants - called by God, equipped by God, put to work by God, successful by God, praised by God. But I hear voices distracting me. I hear excuses. I like my excuses. I like my comfort, my convenience; I like my way, my thing. I'm not the only one here who thinks that way, am I? I've given - we've given - God plenty of reasons to say: “You wicked, lazy servant.” And then what? Weeping and gnashing of teeth. For what? The crime Jesus is judging here isn't child abuse or selling drugs to kids. The crime Jesus is judging here is doing nothing - blowing off God's call to action and sitting on our excuses.

Do you see those shields? Shields of the apostles. Do you know why they [the apostles] answered Jesus' call to action? Do you know why they

put their lives on the line? It wasn't the threat of weeping and gnashing of teeth. It wasn't that they didn't have anything else to do. It wasn't that they had all this extra time, talent, and treasure on their hands. No, it was this - they knew Jesus and what Jesus had done for them.

We know Jesus and what he has done for us. We confessed together - **“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord”!** “He’s my Lord!” Those are big words, aren’t they? Big words we don’t always live by, so we confessed together - **“Lord, have mercy on us! Christ, have mercy on us! Lord, have mercy on us!”** Then we heard it together - and it sounds so good! - **“By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, he has removed your guilt forever.”** It sounds so good: **“He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent sufferings and death.”** Yes, we know Jesus and what he has done for us. And we know why - **“All this he did that we should be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true!”** Yes, we know Jesus and what he has done for us!

That’s why we’re here. Not to avoid weeping and gnashing of teeth. Not because we have extra time on our hands. No, we are here because we know Jesus and what he has done for us.

And that’s why - when Jesus calls us to action - to give, and not just to give, but to grow in the grace of giving, to grow and to excel in giving, we don’t listen to the excuses. We don’t settle for the distractions. But we step in, we step up, we give like the Lord has given to us. Not to avoid weeping and gnashing, not because we have so much extra. No, this is why - because we know Jesus and what he has done for us. And we know what he will say to us - **“Well done, good and faithful servant! Come and share your master’s happiness!”** Amen.