1. The giving of talents
   a. My dad was a good man. Looking back now it is much easier to see the sacrifices he made than when I felt entitled to those sacrifices in my younger years. My dad was the general manager of a tool and party goods rental store. He was second in charge of the organization, behind the owner, and was more trusted in the company than the owner’s own sons and brother.
   b. My dad got each of his three sons a job working for him. My older brother still works there and, in fact, has my dad’s job now. He has always loved the business, the work, the whole deal. We are all different, and while I always respected my dad, especially as a hard worker, I was never interested in working in that business. I did work there because it got me a job. But I never tried to excel. I never tried to make him proud. I just took the job and did what I needed to do until I was through college and seminary and was doing what I wanted to do.
   c. Looking back, I know I never appreciated that my dad got me a job that was steady, 40+ hours a week, well above minimum wage. I always treated it like, “Of course my dad gave me a job. Why wouldn’t he?” I recognize now that he hired all three of his sons, two of which took up positions and money that could have gone to qualified people who would have actually benefitted the business. But I guess that is the kind of things dad’s do – hire their lazy sons instead of good employees, and show their kids that they believe in them.
   d. That is also what God does. One of the most amazing things to me is that the same God who has the power to create an entire universe with his words, and whose very essence upholds the creation, is a God who invites us into his plan, to walk alongside him and do ministry and work in his kingdom. He doesn’t need us to do it. And we aren’t very good at it in comparison. Even the truly visionary leaders, the Billy Grahams of the world, aren’t very good at the work of the kingdom compared to God. Yet God, in his love and his wisdom, calls us as imperfect servants to do the work which he could do perfectly.
   e. Our gospel reading is another parable where Jesus was talking about being ready for his final return. So he represents himself as a man going away on a journey. It says that the man, before going away, called his servants and entrusted his property to them. It seems clear that the master intended for them to use the talents to conduct business and do the work the master would have done had he been there.
   f. What we should see at this point is that we are the servants in the parable. We are the people entrusted to the master’s property, with the expectation that we do something with it. Jesus is showing how we are called to participate in the work of the kingdom, doing the work of the master. The primary work of the master, Jesus, was to call people to repentance and to believe in him as the Messiah and savior; a call to be reconciled to the Father and enter into his kingdom.

2. Faithfulness with the talents
a. In the parable, the three servants were each given different amounts of money. The term talent was the name of a very large sum of money. Even the one given only one talent was given an incredible amount to work with.

b. Two of the servants were faithful with the money they were given. They immediately set to work, hitting the marketplace, making deals, increasing the money, growing the master’s estate. Each of these servants doubled the incredible sums they were given, which was no small feat. Doubling five dollars may not be hard. But doubling five billion would be.

c. The first servant was given the most talents. He was given an incredible sum. Moving the metaphor to disciples, this servant was given some incredible gifts and skills for serving in the kingdom of God. These types of servants are people like Billy Graham and Charles Spurgeon, whose gifts were so abundant that we could never quantify the millions of people their ministry brought into the kingdom. Most of us aren’t Billy Graham or Charles Spurgeon.

d. The second servant was given less than half of the first. He wasn’t expected to make the same amount as the first. By doubling his amount, he still made less than half what the first servant made. Yet his faithfulness to his master led him to still have an incredible return on investment. If the first group of servants represent that upper 1% or less- the truly visionary, transcendent type leaders- then this second group would make up the big names that might be the few in a generation type people. There was no equal to Billy Graham during his ministry. But there are a handful of RC Sprouls or Rick Warrens in every generation. They do big and wonderful things and tremendous work for the kingdom.

e. Most of us aren’t those guys either. Their faithfulness to the work given, in each case, led to the master’s great satisfaction in them. The master said to each, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”

f. This is an ironic statement because he gave them huge sums of money and then commended them for being faithful with the little he had given them. Because of that faithfulness, he would set them over much. Imagine how much God has, and how big God is, if he considers faithfulness over millions or billions of dollars to be faithfulness over a little.

g. Now, you and I, we aren’t Billy Graham. We aren’t RC Sproul. We aren’t Mother Theresa, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or Martin Luther. We may just be one talent servants. But, you know what? One talent is an awful lot. It is a tremendous amount to work with.

h. You may look at yourself and think, “Man, my gift is little.” You might be like Liz Horrom, who has a tremendous gift to see people’s needs and where they are hurting, and to just step in and selflessly serve people right when she sees their need. If I know Liz, I know that she doesn’t think that she is the most gifted person in the world. But that gift is a kingdom gift that God has given for transforming lives and leading people into his kingdom. Even if it is a one talent gift in comparison to being the guy with the gift to start the Protestant Reformation, it is an incredibly large, meaningful gift that God intends to use for the advancement of his own purposes.
i. We all have been entrusted with an incredible amount of God’s property for use in his kingdom. The question is, will we be faithful with what we have?

3. The wrong image of the Master
   a. The third servant in the parable was the one talent servant. He wasn’t faithful with his gift. He went and buried the talent so as to not make any mistakes. When asked why, he said, “Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.”
   b. This servant was afraid that he would let the master down. What if he lost his talent? What if he came back empty handed? Would not the master be angry with him? So he went and hid the money because he wanted to at least be able to hand back the original talent, shiny and new.
   c. Do you do the same thing? Are you so afraid of not succeeding, that you fail by default, burying your immeasurable and invaluable gifts and ignoring the honor given to you to come alongside Jesus and minister in his kingdom?
   d. This servant in the parable was treated harshly, having his one talent taken away, and being thrown from the kingdom completely. Why? Because he had at least two things wrong about the master.
   e. First, he believed that the master was a hard man, someone taking what he didn’t earn and living off the work of others. Instead of seeing the honor in being invited into the work, he saw it as the laziness of the master in making others do his work.
   f. Second, he thought that the talent was more important to the master than the servant’s use of the talent. The master wasn’t looking for him to just hold onto it. He wanted the servant to invest it and at least attempt to get a return, even if he ended up coming back with less money than before.
   g. Jesus left after his resurrection, but he promised to return. When he left, he made sure that everyone was given some talent for work in the kingdom. Some were given huge talents, others smaller talents. Some serve faithfully, some are afraid and do nothing, others spurn the idea that they should ever serve Jesus and do his work.
   h. My encouragement to you all is to not bury your talent. Accept the honor bestowed on you to serve Jesus and come alongside him in his kingdom work. I promise you that you cannot fail if you are doing what you have been given to do. And the reward of the faithful servant is to hear Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”