

There is not one thing we possess that is more valuable than possessing Christ. There is not one dream or longing more precious than our longing for Him. There is no knowledge higher than knowledge of Christ Jesus.

Writing His Life into Ours

GOD HAS IMPECCABLE MANNERS and does not force anyone into intimacy or obedience. He leaves that decision up to each individual believer. We can give ourselves over to the deep joys and rewarding experiences of a relationship with Him, or we can tuck away our salvation in a secret place, drawing it out from storage only upon our entrance into heaven.

The option before us is not unlike that offered the slaves in Jesus' parable about the talents.

"For [the kingdom of heaven] is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey."

A literal "talent," in New Testament times, was not an exceptional ability, as we might use the word, but a monetary unit, and represented a rather exorbitant sum of money. Jesus, however, employed this monetary term to make a point about the gifts (including money) and abilities entrusted to every believer.

But a portion of the parable works just as well to illustrate the opportunity given to every Christian to turn their salvation from a one-time experience into an ongoing process—a deep and meaningful life getting to know Christ and living by His ways.

"Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money."

Matthew 25:14-18

Some believers take the free salvation from

the Lord and make it grow. They look upon it as an open door of opportunity. They now possess the free gift of entrance into the present kingdom of heaven and are eager to use it to deepen their relationship with Him.

Some believers, however, place their free salvation in a lock box. They look upon it not as an open door, but as a key to a closed door that they will not open until they are reclined upon their death bed. Their ticket—their salvation in Christ—never sees the light of day until it must be proffered at their passage through the gate of paradise. Up to that critical point their salvation has gathered dust and mold in a secret place they never visit.

In His parable, Jesus made clear His response to the behavior of each of the slaves.

"The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.'

"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master...'

"The one who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.' "But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave... take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.'"

Matthew 25:20-21, 24-26a, 27-28

Modern society is big on possessions (the bigger the better), and on fanciful and elaborate longings (the more lurid the better).

Yet even Christians sometimes ignore

their greatest possession, the deepest longing they might experience, and the opportunity afforded them to obtain a profound, life-changing knowledge of very God. In a way, they believe this fallen world's lie that an invisible God is unimportant, and immaterial to the present. But the believer's eternal life *is* part of the present—it is already underway—and part of that eternity is to "know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

It does not stop there, however. "Knowing" the true God and His Son, Jesus Christ, goes far beyond the process of collecting facts. Knowledge is not the end, but just another doorway. "Knowing" God is the life-enriching process of writing His life into ours; in its fullness it is synonymous with *lordship*.

And there's the rub.

Too often the persistent spirit of flesh that lingers in the Christian erects a barrier to lordship, for the flesh is jealous, and unwilling to hand over something it believes to be its own. Thus the believer's faith-life stagnates, and his eternal life is not enjoyed, but postponed. The common response is, "Why would I want to gain Christ? Look at what I would be giving up!" That is the sound of persistent, jealous flesh.

But to gain Christ is to come into possession of something so substantial, so precious that every other possession turns to insignificant vapor. Gaining Christ means, as *The Expanded Vine's* puts it,

...so practically appropriating Christ to oneself that He becomes the dominating power in and over one's whole being and circumstances.

To gain Christ is to overwrite the spirit of flesh with the Spirit of very God.

