

ONLINE CHURCH CAN HELP - BUT IT MIGHT NOT BE ENOUGH

Sunday, August 1st, 2021, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching # 2123

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Matthew 25:14-30 - “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. [15] To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. [16] He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. [17] So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. [18] But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. [19] Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. [20] And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' [21] His master said to him, '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.' [22] And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' [23] His master said to him, '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.' [24] He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, [25] so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' [26] But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed? [27] Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. [28] So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. [29] For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. [30] And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

1) **WHAT IS THE MASTER LOOKING FOR IN A GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT?**

There are, of course, obvious traits of character the master is looking for in these servants. He calls them together and entrusts them with the goods of his estate. As he leaves he is counting on two principles being strongly rooted in his servants:

- a) ***He wants those servants to understand that the wealth they are investing is not their own.*** This is why he is placing such trust in these servants. He has something at stake. If they take the money and go to Hawaii they are crooks, not stewards.

Everything in my Christian life hinges on this important understanding in my heart. My perspective frequently needs aligning:

IPAD TEXT - 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 - “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

Paul addresses these Christians and isn't sure they know this truth as well as they need to know it - ***“Do you not know...?”***
 Whenever I stand at the communion table I try to remind myself of what it is I'm declaring so regularly. ***Do I just see myself as saved, or do I see myself as bought - purchased - owned by Another?***

That is what the word ***“redeemed”*** means. “I have a song I love to sing since I have been ***redeemed.***” ***“Redeemed*** how I love to proclaim it.” Redeemed means bought. Redeemed means changed ***ownership*** - ***“You are not your own.”***

- b) ***The master wants them to work as hard with his wealth while he is away as they would if he were present.*** He wants these servants to be as loyal to him when they couldn't see him as when they could. This, of course, is where the third servant failed.
- 2) **THE FAITHFUL SERVANTS ELIMINATED THE TEMPTATION TO MISUSE OR WASTE THEIR MASTER'S GOODS BY SETTING TO WORK WITH THEM RIGHT AWAY**

IPAD TEXT - Matthew 25:16-17 - “He who had received the five talents went *at once* and traded with them, and he made five talents more. [17] So *also* he who had the two talents made two talents more.

Servant number one went “***at once***” to work with his master’s goods. “***So also***,” Jesus said, servant number two set out. That is, ***at once***, without any hesitation, just like servant number one. “***So also***” - “***immediately***” in some translations - ***euthus (yoo-thoos)***. The word has its roots in the word for “***straight***” or “***direct***.” We still say “the shortest distance between two points is a ***straight line***.”

Jesus means these servants took no ***detours*** on the way to their assignments. They were ***undistracted***. Unlike many of us, there was nothing they felt they had to do ***first, before*** they got to the business of looking after the interests of their master. They weren’t waiting for retirement. They weren’t assuming others could do a better job than they. There was an ***excitement*** about their stewardship. They had a sense of anticipation.

Or, as the Psalmist would have put it long ago, they knew what it was to “***serve the Lord with gladness!***” Not just ***worship*** the Lord with gladness. ***Serve*** the Lord with gladness.

Nothing opens the door for failure in the Christian life like ***putting off what you know you should be doing for the Lord***. The one talent servant didn't fail because he had less to work with. He failed because, ***before he did anything else, he dug a hole in the ground and hid his talent***. He ***made time*** for his wickedness. It's what you do ***first*** that matters ***most***.

There is such truth here. You can ***move out immediately to obey the Lord with your stewardship***, or, more than you know, you will ***dig your life into a hole you never get out of***. We all know it to be true - there will ***never*** be enough money, or time, or energy ***left over*** for the Lord. That's because God never ***designed*** life to work that way.

3) **SERVANTS ARE REWARDED ON THE BASIS OF FAITHFULNESS, NOT GIFTEDNESS**

IPAD TEXT - Matthew 25:19-23 - "Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. [20] And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' [21] His master said to him, '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.' [22] And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' [23] His master said to him, '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.'"

The more you study this parable, the more you will see how carefully crafted it is. This simple story is fitted together like the pieces of a model car or airplane.

For example, there is a reason Jesus included **three** servants. If all He wanted to do was compare **obedient** stewardship with **disobedient** stewardship He could have left out the two talent servant in the middle and just compared the five talent servant with the one talent servant. That would have made the point that we must invest and not hide our master's goods in the ground.

But that is not the **only** point Jesus was laboring to make. He included **three** servants because **He also wanted to compare the two faithful servants** in terms of their **reward when the master came back**. He specifically compared the two **faithful** servants to show that their **reward was the same, even though one was working with bigger numbers than the other** - five talents increase as compared with two.

They received the **same reward** because they were **equally faithful** with their assigned stewardship. They both put their master first with what they were given. They both went out to work for their master **immediately** when he left. They both put the master's concerns above their own. They both worked as faithfully when the master was away as they did when he was present. **And they both received the same reward.**

Behold God's method for putting greatness within everyone's reach in His kingdom. This is why, at times, the first will be last and the last will be first. I can still remember when churches used to sing:

"Little is much when God is in it
Labor not for wealth or fame
There is a crown, and **you can** win it
If you'll go in Jesus' Name"

That's a very precious truth. You don't need the world's greatest talents. And you don't need the biggest stage. You simply need the most faithful heart.

The opposite edge of that truth is equally sharp. The greatest gifts and the highest profile will count for nothing if pride or arrogance or self-will kept a simple faithfulness to Jesus from motivating all you do.

4) **LESSONS FROM A WASTED LIFE**

IPAD TEXT - Matthew 25:24-30 - “He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, [25] so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' [26] But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed? [27] Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. [28] So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. [29] For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. [30] And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'”

This is obviously the part of the story Jesus wanted emphasized. There are *more verses given to this unfaithful servant than there are to both the others*. The unfaithful servant is the story's punch line.

- a) ***By his own admission, fear kept this steward from doing his job for his master. Matthew 25:25 - "...so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."*** - IPAD TEXT

In a way, this servant blames his failure on his *master*. He says he knew his master had high expectations and demanded productivity. Because he was afraid of his master, he buried his master's money in the ground.

The master, however, won't let that excuse stand. After all, if the servant feared the master so much, you would think that he would also have feared his master's judgement for disobeying him. Clearly the real explanation lies elsewhere.

- b) ***The master describes the servant as both wicked and lazy - Matthew 25:26 - "But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed?'"*** - IPAD TEXT

The Creator, who knows exactly what is in our hearts, gives a one hundred percent accurate diagnosis of the servant's real problem. And it's quite different from the servant's own words.

“Pastor Don, I really feel there are other people out there who are better qualified than I am for that job.” That sentence gets voiced in churches across this land ten thousand times a Sunday. And the people who speak it think they’re being humble - almost godly.

But the Master would say, “Yes, you’re right. There are five and ten talent people all over the place. But that’s not the issue. The issue is your faithfulness with your **one talent**. And the issue is your avoidance of using what I have given you because you think there are better qualified people. But never forget, **you’re my servant as much as they.**”

Surely that’s the whole point of Jesus’ story. That’s why, in His telling, He has the **one** talent person hide his master’s talent in the ground. Jesus is trying to show that **one talent people are just as liable for judgement for failure as ten talent people.**

Here’s the bottom line. This final servant **puts his own security** above his **master’s instructions**. And for that he is judged severely. He lived like it was up to him whether or not to work with that **one** talent. But it **wasn’t** up to him at all. He forgot he was a **servant**. And, in Jesus’ story, there is simply no way to spiritualize that failure.

- c) **Uselessness is as eternally damming as wickedness** -
Matthew 25:28-30 - "So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. [29] For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. [30] And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." -
IPAD TEXT

How seriously does the master take this issue of faithfulness and fruitfulness in the lives of his servants? That's what these verses deal with. Jesus is teaching that we **vastly underestimate the importance of fruitful service for Him!** He's trying to alert us to a coming reckoning that will have surprising elements for those who claim His Name.

You don't have to **lose** what you've been given. The one talent servant didn't lose any of his master's money. He simply **did nothing to multiply it**. There were chances to put his time and energy into his master's work and he didn't bother.

Does that matter? Apparently it does - a great deal. The master called these stewards together initially to **do his work while he was away**. The master wanted **them** to care about his work as much as **he** cared about it while he was present.

So we learn a very important truth. We learn that the Christian life was never meant to be understood as ***new life received for ourselves***. We learn that the Christian life was meant, in Jesus' mind, to be received as ***new life for the Master's service***. It's salt, put into meat to season it. It's light put high on a hill to enlighten it. It's disciples sent into the world to reclaim it. ***Talents mean mission.***

Just as it's not enough to have your lamp lit at one time, without maintaining and replenishing oil for the future, so receiving gifts from the gracious master is not an end that will sustain itself when the master comes back to judge and reckon with His servants.

Fear uselessness like you fear pornography or the occult.

Jesus never once warned about ***over stressing ourselves*** in His kingdom - not once. What He warned about was a wicked laziness that would preserve selfish security and lack of fruitfulness in His kingdom.

Remember, Jesus is our Creator. He made us from the ground up. He knows best how to preserve and fulfill our lives. He knows there are only ***two choices that wear out and destroy our lives***. Either we can serve the ***wrong*** master. Or, and this is far more common, we can try to serve ***two*** masters. Either way, those are the paths to weariness, frustration and spiritual ruin. But you never lose putting God's kingdom first and seeking it with all your might. Jesus said so.

And His advice now, as it was then, is to lose yourself in His mission. Put energetic, passionate, sacrificial effort into being a good and faithful servant. That's the best way to find your life both now and eternally.