

Sunday, July 26, 2020

Bible Study **Matthew 25:14-30**

Listen to Pastor Maury's sermon for July 26. Then read Matthew 25:14-30.

We first need to recognize that everything belongs to God. He owns everything and in His sovereignty he decides where it goes, even us (*Psalms 50:10-12; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20*). The second thing we need to notice is that the master is “partnering” with his servants. He is giving them his resources (v. 15) and, trusting in their abilities, gives them free rein in how those resources are used.

The **faithful servants** in our parable put the master's talents to good use. They made them count for something. They used them in a way that gave honor to their master. The **unfaithful servant** squirreled it away. Buried it, and left it alone. Like hiding a light under a basket (*Matthew 5:14-16*), he made zero effort to even use the gift.

Each servant was in partnership with their master. Think about that for a moment. Regardless of where you are or what you do, it all belongs to Him and comes from Him and it's in your hands today because He is partnering WITH you to get the job done. It's you AND God, not you alone.

Did you notice what the faithful servants received? **“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!”** They were not equal in talent, but they were equal in their faithfulness and love toward the master. Therefore, they each received the same reward: more responsibility and the joy of the master's presence.

However, fear motivated the unfaithful servant to not use the talent given to him. Yet it also seems that he knew the master would expect some sort of return on the investment. His fear was the fear of failure. But it ultimately points to a hard and significant truth, he didn't truly know his master.

Look at the parable again. He makes excuses and ultimately puts the blame for his idleness on the master (vv. 24-25). To his master's face he describes him as a “hard man” who gets rich on the backs of other people, “harvesting where he had not sown and gathering where he had not scattered seed.” We need to read and understand these remarks as an insult. Notice that Jesus' parable didn't begin with, “A harsh, unscrupulous man was going on a trip...”.

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The reply Jesus puts into the mouth of the master is strong sarcasm. He repeats the servant's description of him (*remember the tone is sarcastic here*) and goes on to basically say "add insult to injury and call me a cheating lawbreaker too" (vv. 26-27). Lending money for a profit, for collecting interest (v. 27), was expressly prohibited in the Law (*Deuteronomy 23:19-20*). The unfaithful servant is essentially calling the master ruthless, unjust, and temperamental. People who do not use their gifts in partnership with God, like this last servant, often view Him as harsh and unmerciful, and in a sense bring about their own 'outer darkness'.

Long ago, a pastor once made an investment in a large piece of ranch land which he hoped to enjoy during his years of retirement. While he was still an active pastor, he would take one day off each week to go out to his land and work. But what a job! What he had bought, he soon realized, were acres of weeds, gopher and armadillo holes, rundown barns, and a neglected ranch house. It was anything but attractive, but the pastor knew it had potential and he stuck with it.

Every week he'd go to his ranch, crank up his small tractor, and bush-hog through the weeds and over-growth with a vengeance. He cleared fence-line and repaired fences. Then he spent time doing repairs on the barns and the house. He mixed cement, cut lumber, replaced broken windows, repaired roofs, and worked on the plumbing. It was hard work, but after several months the place began to take shape. And every time the pastor put his hand to some task, he would feel a bit of pride because he knew his labor was finally paying off.

When the project was completed, the pastor received a neighborly visit from a farmer who lived a few miles down the road. Farmer Brown took a long look at the preacher and cast a longer eye over the revitalized property. Then he nodded his approval and said, "Well, preacher, it looks like you and God really did some work here."

The pastor, wiping the sweat from his face, answered, "You're absolutely right. No doubt about it. I couldn't have done this without the Lord's help. But I've got to tell you — you should have seen this place when God had it all to Himself."

Listen, God is sovereign over all creation. If He wants to split the sea wide open, I suppose He could simply tell it to split. If He wants to bring down the most powerful city in the world, I suppose that the thunder of His voice could shatter that city to dust. And if He wanted to turn the most untamed country you've ever seen into the most beautifully manicured ranch you've ever seen. Well, I suppose He could whisper, even that, into being.

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But friends, read your Bible. He split the sea apart, but Moses held over it the staff God had given him (*Exodus 14:15-16, 21*). God brought down one of the most powerful cities in the world, but Joshua and the Israelites marched around it till it crumbled (*Joshua 6*). And God does (routinely) turn untamed country-side into beautiful pieces of land, but men and women faithfully work that land until it is complete. Time and time again God, in His sovereignty, chooses to partner with us to get the job done.

Scripture teaches that every Christian has been given a gift for the purpose of strengthening and building up the church (*Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10*). You have a gift, and you are in this body of believers because this body of believers needs you to use your giftedness.

And now, may you faithfully serve our Lord. May you serve our Lord in such a way that you feel His presence in partnership with you to accomplish those ‘good works’ He has long prepared for you to do (*Ephesians 2:10*). And may you, at His return, also hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant...”

Questions for Further Reflection

Have you ever known someone who squandered or neglected their talent? What happened to them? Would things have been different if they had simply used their gifts?

How does the master’s treatment of his three servants seem to you? What about the treatment of the third servant, in particular? Why did the third servant hide his talent? Is his description of his master true or just an excuse for his laziness?

If the Master returned today, what would he say about how you’ve used, for His kingdom, that which he gave you? Have you ever observed or experienced that the more you use a gift from God, the more gifts God gives you?

How are the faithful use of our gifts and preparing for the return of our Lord related to each other? What will you do for God’s kingdom this week with the gifts and talents that God has given you?

What is the overall message of this parable? Why do you suppose Jesus thought it necessary to repeat his point so many times and in so many different ways (*read chapters 23-25*)?