

February 2, 2020

“The Parable of the Talents”
Matthew 25:14-30

FCF: The need to be prepared

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus’ return is a future reality.
(magnet) We must be prepared as faithful servants.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

You might have heard that today is Super Bowl Sunday. Whatever your level of interest - whether you’re gearing up with face paint, just there for the ads, or turning on “Puppy Bowl XVI” instead - any of us can be impressed with the level of preparation that goes into this game. Certainly with the athletes, coaches, and broadcasters but also the stadium crew. The logos have been painted onto new grass, grass which sits in the midst of a \$550 million stadium refit that includes four video boards and reconstructed stands and suites. And that involved 6,000 people.

It’s a big event. Big events demand preparation. Our text speaks of a greater event, one that stands with creation, the Fall, and the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. It is His return.

SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 25:14-30**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

We have returned to the Olivet Discourse, recorded in Matthew 24-25. This is teaching by Jesus on the Mount of Olives, just east of Jerusalem, on Tuesday during Holy Week. He is addressing His disciples, giving an overview of events to come in the near and distant future. In the course of this, Jesus tells a series of four parables. The first three - the homeowner and the thief, the good and wicked servants, and the ten bridesmaids - speak to the certainty of His return but the uncertainty of the timing. For many, it will be utterly unexpected. For some, it will come far sooner than they expected. And for yet others, it will come much later than they expected. With all of that in mind, there is for all of us a need to be prepared, of watching and being ready.

But what would it mean to watch and be ready? Which brings us to the fourth of these parables. That’s the focus of this story, often called “The Parable of the Talents”. Jesus’ return is a future reality. His return is a future reality. And so we must be prepared as faithful servants.

What does that mean? Well, we need to look at three groups of characters to understand the main points. So we’ll be looking at the master, the good servants, and the wicked servant.

I. THE MASTER

First, the master (**READ Matthew 25:14-15**). What does the master represent?

A) What He Entrusted

Let’s start with what he entrusted to his servants, what he gave over to them.

1. Away on a journey

Clearly, he was a man of great wealth. And such men often went on long journeys. Given the uncertainties of travel in the ancient world, the timing of his return was somewhat unpredictable.

2. Delegated his wealth

So he went on this journey. But before he left, he entrusted control of his estate to his servants. It's broken down into talents - not gifts or abilities but units of weight tied to currency. At that time, one talent was about 20 years wages for an ordinary laborer. So that's about \$600,000.

B) What He Expected

That's what the master entrusted to them. What did he expect to come from all of this?

1. The different amounts delegated

Different amounts were delegated. He knows the abilities of each servant and parcels it out.

2. A return on his investment

The master expects wise stewarding, a return on his investment, an expansion of his kingdom.

So what do we make of all this? As with the master in the story, the Lord entrusts to each and all of us some proportion of His resources. And He expects us to be good stewards of it.

Application:

How do we translate this into our own context? What has been entrusted into our care? Our material possessions, gifts and abilities, opportunities and experiences, our circumstances and time - none of which is ours. We own none of it. We are but stewards. We are but servants.

Jesus' return is a sure and certain reality. And so we must prepare as faithful servants.

II. THE THE GOOD SERVANTS

That brings us to the good servants. The first two form one category and so one point.

A) How They Responded

What did they do? How did they respond to this charge from their master?

1. They were all in

They were all in (READ Matthew 25:16-17). They went out immediately, put what they'd been given to work, and doubled it. Their response was quick, glad, and complete. They were all in.

2. And were commended

And they were commended for it (READ Matthew 25:19-21). And the second was commended just as the first. Both servants received the master's approval, praise, privileges, and reward.

B) What That Reflected

That was how they responded. What did that reflect? What did it demonstrate?

1. Contentment with what they had been given

A contentment with what they had been given. There are no hints of comparisons or complaints.

2. Trust in their master

Just contentment. And trust in their master. They knew he was not looking for them to be or do something they could not but to do their best with what they had. Which was beautifully freeing.

So what do we make of this? Just taking this at face value, as with the good servants, we will be commended and rewarded when we faithfully fulfill the tasks the Lord has given us.

Application:

How do we translate this? Note that the master was equally pleased with both servants. Both were faithful to what was given to them. And both were commended for it. Now this is not salvation by works or merit. These servants labored the way they did in the context of a trusting dependence upon their master. So all of this presupposes what? A relationship with the master.

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III. THE WICKED SERVANT

Which brings us to the third servant, the one described as a wicked servant.

A) How He Responded

What did he do? How did he respond to this charge from the master?

1. He held back

Well, he held back (**READ Matthew 25:18**). He played it safe. There were no safe deposit boxes in the ancient world so he hid it in the ground. Archeologists continue to find such caches today.

2. And was condemned

He held back. For that he was condemned (**READ Matthew 25:24-28**). The master responds very differently here. This servant was condemned, corrected, privileges removed, and punished.

B) What That Reflected

That was how this servant responded. What did that reflect? What did it demonstrate?

1. How he saw the situation

He saw this as a no-win scenario. "If I toil and gain, the master will take it all. If I toil and lose, I will be punished." So, having no interest in the kingdom's expansion, he buried his talent.

2. How he saw the master

But how he saw the situation was actually an extension of how he saw the master - a hard man, harsh and grasping. In which, the servant shows himself to be wicked and slothful, evil and idle.

What do we make of this? As with the wicked servant, if we fail to use the gifts God has given us for His service, we will be punished, forever cut off from Him and all good things.

Application:

How do we translate this? There are many factors that impact the effectiveness of our labor and service to the Master - our schedules and energy levels, our education and experiences, our age and health, our self-discipline and motivation, our marital and family status. These are all truly significant. But the greatest of these is our heart toward the Master. And the way we answer these questions, "Whose talents and resources are these? And why do we have them?"

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CONCLUSION:

To be prepared for a significant event is something we understand from everyday life and the news. No doubt you've heard of the coronavirus. The World Health Organization declared this outbreak in China to be a global health emergency. The United States has issued a stern

travel warning. As of today, all flights from China to the U. S. will be funneled to seven airports and American citizens returning from Wuhan province will be subject to a 2-week quarantine.

Officials are unsure of how the virus is transmitted. If it's airborne, then respirator masks could be effective. So let me throw a scenario at you. Let's say it's clear (1) an outbreak here was imminent and (2) we knew a mask could protect you. What would you do? Get a mask.

You would do what it took to be prepared. Now the analogy fails in that Jesus' return is hardly like the onset of a plague. It's more like the return of a king, a long-awaited and much loved ruler of His people, who will bring blessings to His people and is coming to make things right, to reclaim and to restore all that is rightfully His. For Jesus' return is the best of news.

His return is a future and sure reality. And so we must prepare as faithful servants.

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus' return is a future reality.
(magnet) We must be prepared as faithful stewards.