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Matthew 25:14 - 25:30



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In Matthew 25:14-30, Steve Gregg speaks about the responsibility of disciples of Jesus to pursue the interests of the Kingdom of God and advance its progress. The parable talks about how talents are not only related to money, but also to time, abilities, connections, and whatever can accrue to the advantage of positively influencing people towards Christ. The reward is received not based on the amount given, but on the results produced through risky investment or low-risk opportunities, used to promote the interests of Christ. The focus lies in being prepared to speak the word of Christ and promote the gospel when the opportunity presents itself.

Transcript

As we make our way through Matthew chapter 25, which is the concluding chapter of the Olivet Discourse, where Jesus spoke both about the second coming of Christ and also of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, which occurred in 70 AD, we come to the second of three parables in this chapter. The first parable in Matthew 25 was in the first 13 verses, the parable of the ten virgins or the ten bridesmaids. And the lesson of that parable was that the bridegroom, Christ, might yet delay longer than the disciples think before he returns.

And they should be like the wise bridesmaids who were prepared for that to happen. They had enough oil to last them just in case the bridegroom took longer than they thought he would take. The foolish bridesmaids did not anticipate such a delay and found themselves unprepared for it.

So that the disciples are urged by this parable, and all Christians are urged by this parable, to be anticipating that there may be a longer wait for the coming of Christ than we would hope, and that we need to remain faithful to the end, even if his delay is great. At this point in time, of course, his delay has been a great delay. It's been close to 2,000 years absent, but his coming is nearer than when we first believed.

Now, the second parable in this chapter begins at verse 14, commonly called the parable of the talents. Now, the word talent, we need to understand, does not refer in this

passage to what we in modern English use that term to mean. When we say that a person has many talents, we mean that that person is skilled or adept or gifted in many areas, that that person might have a profound ability in music or in art or in oratory or in some other thing, and we call that a talent that they have.

Now, the word talent in older English, when the King James was translated, was a reference to a weight, a measure of weight. And in this particular case, as in most places in the Bible, whenever the Bible talks about a talent, I mean, we could substitute the word a pound or an ounce or something like that. It would not be equivalent, but it would give the idea of what we're talking about.

We're talking about a certain measurement of weight, a ton. Actually, a talent might be as much as a hundred pounds. But anyway, there are different talents.

There were talents of silver, there were talents of gold, and these were used instead of money at a time where coinage had not become universal. We are accustomed to having coins that represent a certain value, even if the metals from which they are made are not of any great value at all. Yet, in those days, although there were such things as coins, it was more common to do business by weighing out silver or possibly gold, and in doing so to pay whatever transaction fees there were for any business that had to be done.

So, when we read about talents in this parable, we're talking about a weight of money. Most likely, they were talents of silver, but they could have been talents of gold. In any case, we need to realize that the word talent doesn't mean exactly the same thing here as it does in our modern usage.

In Matthew 25, verse 14, Jesus said, For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. It's like when you go on a trip and you get somebody to house-sit for you, someone to take care of the lawn, someone to feed the animals for you. This man was going on a long journey.

He was a wealthy man with a lot of goods. He had servants, and so he committed the care of his goods into the hands of his servants. Now, the servants were not simply to take these as gifts to themselves and go out and do what they wished with them for their own advantage.

They were to use them the way he would use them if he were not gone. They were sort of his agents, and they were using his money. And if he had not gone on this trip, he would have gone out and probably made money with his money.

And so they were expected to take his money and as his servants, as his agents in this case, his stewards, to go out and use his money to make money for him as he would. That was their responsibility. So he delivered his goods to his servants, and to one he

gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one.

To each according to his own ability, and immediately he went on a journey. Now, not all these servants had the same amount given to them. He gave each one according to his ability.

The master apparently perceived the skills and the aptitudes and the competence of these servants and proportionately gave them responsibility according to what he knew they could be expected to handle. And he went on his journey. Then he who had received five talents went and traded with them and made another five talents.

Likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground and hid his lord's money. After a long time, the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, Lord, you delivered to me five talents. Look, I have gained five more talents besides them. His lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant.

You were faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.

He also who had received two talents came and said, Lord, you delivered to me two talents, and look, I have gained two more talents besides them. His lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things.

I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord. Then he who had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew you to be a hard man reaping where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed, and I was afraid and I went and I hid your talent in the ground.

Look, there you have what is yours. But his lord answered and said to him, You wicked and lazy servant. You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed.

Therefore you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him and give it to him who has ten talents. For everyone who has, more will be given to him, and he will have abundance.

But to him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And thus ends this parable. Now this parable has some things in common with the

previous parable. Both of them are making a similar point, but each of them has its own angle.

The previous parable about the ten bridesmaids, five foolish and five wise, and this parable about the three stewards has some things in common. First of all, there is a lord. In the first parable he's the bridegroom.

In this case he's the master of the estate. There is also somebody who has been entrusted with responsibility. In the first parable it is the bridesmaids.

They have a responsibility to know and to announce when the bridegroom is coming and to light his way with their lamps. In the second parable it is the stewards who have been given charge over some of his goods to use in order to enrich his estate while he is gone. Now, so we have the lord and we have those to whom he has entrusted responsibility.

In both parables the lord represents Jesus, and those to whom the responsibility has been entrusted represents the Christians, the followers of Christ. So both of these parables tell us of a responsibility that we who are disciples of Jesus have. They also both speak of a day of reckoning where the responsible management of this duty is rewarded and the irresponsible mismanagement of the duty is penalized.

In the case of the wedding analogy it's when the bridegroom comes. In the case of this parable it's when the master returns. And in both cases there are some who have done well and will be rewarded with the festivities.

The five wise bridesmaids, they go into the wedding feast and enjoy the festivities. The faithful stewards in this parable actually enter into their lord's joy, into their master's joy, probably his celebration of his return. However, in both parables there are some who have not done so well.

The five foolish virgins, what do we read of them in the final analysis? We read that they are cast out into outer darkness. So it says, well let me see here. It says, while they went to buy the bridegroom came and those who were ready went with him, this is verse 10, to the wedding and the door was shut.

Afterward the other virgins came also saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Assuredly I say to you, I do not know you. So he did not let them in, they had to stay outside in the dark.

Likewise, this steward in this parable who misused his responsibility, he is cast out into outer darkness in verse 30 and there's weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now, all these parables, of course, are making a certain point, even the one at the end of Matthew 24 about the servant. The faithful servant is blessed when his master comes and finds him faithful.

An unfaithful servant is punished and cast out into weeping and gnashing of teeth at the end of Matthew 24 when his master comes. See, all these parables have something in common. The master is coming and his servants or whoever else represents the Christians in the parable have a responsibility that will be reckoned with and settled up at his coming.

There is a day of reckoning for the Christian. There is a judgment. And notice that the Christian who has been entrusted something by his Lord, there will be a weeping and gnashing of teeth for the unfaithful.

There will be, in other words, great humiliation, there will be great regret, and it may even refer to a loss of salvation. It's hard to know what weeping and gnashing of teeth means. Outer darkness does not sound like it's in heaven.

Now, we need to understand this lesson because Jesus didn't say these things just to hear the sound of his own voice resonating. He said them because we needed to hear these things. They have import.

They have to do with our eternal destiny and well-being. Now, let's look at this parable a little more closely. Both of these parables, the parable of the ten virgins and this parable of the talents, have one other thing in common, too, and that is that the day of reckoning did not come immediately.

The virgins were waiting for their Lord, but it says in verse 5, while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. The servant at the end of Matthew 24 said, My Lord is delaying his coming. In this present parable of the talents, it says in verse 14, that this man was traveling to a far country.

Presumably, that would take a while to get there and back. Furthermore, in verse 19, it says, After a long time the Lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. Notice, after a long absence.

Jesus in these parables, all three of them speak of a long absence. If people think that Jesus taught he would be coming back immediately, they have not paid attention to his teaching. He indicated that his disciples have to be prepared for a long absence.

During that long absence, they are to be occupied profitably in activities that will benefit his estate or his kingdom. Now, Jesus has left his church with a responsibility. That responsibility is not to find a comfortable life for ourselves, to build our own estates, to build our own kingdoms, to be happy, to be comfortable.

This is not what he has left us with a responsibility to do. We have a responsibility to pursue the interest of his kingdom and to advance its progress. The kingdom of God is advanced in a number of ways.

It is advanced, for one thing, by the preaching of the gospel. Not all of us are evangelists. The Bible says he gave some evangelists, and the rest of us are not necessarily evangelists.

But that doesn't mean that we cannot speak up for Christ when the opportunity presents itself. Certainly, every Christian is to be prepared to give everyone an answer for the hope that lies in him. We need to be prepared to speak for Christ.

If we deny him before men, he said he will deny us before the Father. But if we confess him before men, he will confess us before the Father. Not all of us must be soul winners, necessarily, but we must all be prepared to speak a word for Christ and to promote the gospel when that opportunity presents itself, and that helps to promote the kingdom of God, the interest of Christ.

If we cannot preach, either because we have not the gift of preaching or because we do not have the opportunity, because our calling just doesn't allow for much opportunity there, we can at least promote the preaching of the gospel as others are doing it, missionaries and evangelists and pastors and so forth. We may be spending most of our time working at a regular job that generates a regular paycheck. That can be a calling that God has given us as well, and it can also be done to the glory of God and to the promotion of his kingdom.

After all, being an honest employee or an honest servant or worker is something that will draw attention. As Jesus said, men should see your good works and give glory to your Father which is in heaven. Your good behavior should speak volumes about the truthfulness of the gospel.

The work you do should be quality work, and the money you earn should be seen as God's money, because of course your life is God's, you are his servant, and the time you give to an employer is not really yours to give, it's God's time, and therefore the money that is earned is God's money. Therefore, those who work at a job and they're not preachers or missionaries, they are still serving God in the place of work where they are, and the money they generate is for God's use. Now, obviously God wants you to spend some of that putting food on your table, and clothing on your back, and housing over your head, but what is not necessary for these things is to be seen as elective money.

It's money that you have some choice about, and that should be spent in such ways as you believe will promote the kingdom of God. Now, not everyone has the same opportunity to promote the master's interests. Some have been given many more abilities and opportunities than others.

For example, you might be an unskilled laborer who has to work 10 or 12 hours a day just to make ends meet. You don't have a lot of money, and you don't have a lot of free time, and what you do have to do, maybe working in a noisy factory where you can't

speak up for Christ very much, and the best you can hope to do is to shine by your good works, and by your good attitude, and so forth, and you may get very little other opportunity to do much for the kingdom of God than that. That may be having a single talent, as in the parable.

Other people have more they can do. Maybe they have a little more money they can invest in the kingdom. Maybe they have more time to give to it.

Maybe even though they have time, though, they don't have great oratory gifts or great spiritual insights, and though they can serve God maybe more with a little more time or money that they have, it's more like having the two talents. They're a little better off than the person who can't do much at all, but they may not have the biggest allotment of talents out there. There are, after all, people who are given the liberty of being full-time in the ministry, whether they are pastors, or missionaries, or preachers, or whatever, and these usually are people who have some kind of gifts, preaching or teaching that will help to promote the kingdom of God directly, and they have the time to give to it, and they have the abilities and so forth, and these people have been given even greater talents.

And notice one thing about this. There is the suggestion that God is as pleased with the servant who produced two extra talents with the two he received initially, as he is pleased with the one who produced five extra talents with the five he received initially. In the end, one servant was able to hand his master ten talents.

The other handed his master only four talents, but they both received the same reward. Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord.

But you see, the reason that they received the same reward, although they did not produce the same results, is because they were not given the same amount to begin with. God is a just God. He knows that if he gives you five talents, you've got more to work with.

You who have money, you know, everyone knows money can be used to make money. If a person doesn't have much money, he can't make as much. If a person doesn't have much time free, he can't do as much.

And God knows what he's given each one. Some have been given great opportunities, and to whom much is given, of them much will be required. Some are given fewer opportunities, and God requires them not to produce as much as those who have greater opportunities, but he still expects them to produce as much as they can for his kingdom.

And there are some who have very little abilities given at all. But even they, if, as he says, would put it in the bank, so to speak, which is not a very risky way of investing, could have produced something. You see, the business that the first two servants put

their talents to was risky business.

They invested their money. They went out and traded with it and so forth. And when you do that, you take the chance of losing something.

But you also, because of the higher risk, you have, in many cases, a higher payoff. The one who had received one talent was fearful. He didn't want to take a risk.

He considered his master to be a harsh and unforgiving man. He knew his master, you know, he harvested where he did not sow seeds or plow. This does not mean his master did illegal things.

It just means that his master had servants. He was a powerful man, and he didn't have to go out and plow his own field. Servants did that for him, but he got the harvest.

That was his field they were plowing. And therefore, he was a man of influence and a man of power and intimidating to this servant. This servant did not have a positive relationship with his master and feared him.

Rather than being thankful and trusting of his master, he felt like, well, I better not take any risks with this money. And he did nothing with it. He buried it, and he had only that to give back without profit to his master when his master returned.

This earned him the label wicked and lazy servant. And also, he was thrust out into outer darkness where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth. You can see the master did not accept this behavior.

He said, you could have at least put it in some kind of low-risk investment. You could have put it in the bank, and that would have at least given me a little bit of interest, probably not 100% that these other guys came up with, but it would be something rather than nothing. And essentially, what he's saying is, you acted as if you were not my servant.

You acted as if you had the right to save your own skin and protect yourself rather than devote yourself and endanger yourself and take risks that every Christian must do in order to promote the kingdom of God. Some people say, well, I don't really want to go out and speak for Jesus. I don't really want to spend much money on the gospel.

You know, it's too risky. I might not have enough for myself. I might get persecuted or something.

And so, whatever little opportunity they have, they often don't use it all because of fearfulness. And what this parable teaches is that God has given to every person who is in his kingdom, every one of his servants, some opportunity to produce something for God. And while we are waiting for the coming of Christ, we are to be occupied in this

very thing.

We are to be using the opportunities we have, the money, the time, the abilities, the connections, whatever accrues to our advantage that may influence people in a positive way for Christ, we are to use it as best we can. And even those who don't use it as best they can should use it somewhat. And there will be less reward, of course, for those who do less.

But the point is, if one does nothing, if one lives as if they are not another's servant and just protects themselves and lives the way that makes them feel secure and comfortable and does not concern himself with his master's business, then that person is not a true servant and is an unfaithful servant. This man buried his talent because then he wouldn't have to think about it until his master came back. He'd go about his daily business, not think about improving his master's finances.

And when his master came back, he just dug it up. You see, that's not being actively in the service of your master. That's putting the duty aside and doing your own thing.

That was not okay, as we see. And therefore, he was punished when his master returned. And thus, we have a similar ending to that of the ten bridesmaids.

Some rejoice with their master and some are punished. Thus, it will be when Jesus returns and he reckons with his people to whom he has given responsibilities. That's you and me, folks.

We had better be prepared and active.