

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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The Gospel of Matthew

Beware of Do-Nothing Religion

May 24, 2020
Ascension Sunday

Sermon Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 2

Ephesians 4:8 ESV Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

Our text this morning, our Lord’s parable of the talents, reminds us of Christ’s ascension, His going away for a long time and leaving His servants with gifts which are to be used. Follow along as I read the parable:

Matthew 25:14-30 ESV “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 sown 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.'

As our old friend J.C. Ryle put it, the point of this parable can be stated as:

Let us beware of do-nothing Christianity

Listen to Ryle as he introduces it [Expository Thoughts on the Gospels]:

The parable of the talents which we have now read is near akin to that of the ten virgins. Both parables direct our minds to the same important event, the second advent of Jesus Christ. Both bring before us the same persons, the members of the professing Church of Christ. The virgins and the servants are one and the same people, - but the same people regarded from a different point, and viewed on different sides. The practical lesson of each parable is the main point of difference. *Vigilance* is the key note of the first parable, *diligence* that of the second. The story of the ten virgins calls on the Church to *watch*, the story of the talents calls on the Church to *work*.

And of course Matthew Henry's comment of introduction to this parable is excellent and quite similar:

We have here the parable of the *talents* committed to three servants; this [parable] implies that we are in a state

of work and business, as the former [the ten virgins] implies that we are in a state of expectancy. *That* showed the necessity of habitual preparation, *this* of *actual diligence* in our present work and service. In *that* [10 Virgins] we were stirred up to do well for our own souls; in *this* to lay out ourselves [ie, to give ourselves all out] for the glory of God and the good of others.

Let's have a closer look:

Matthew 25:14-19 ESV "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.

It is plain that the master, this businessman you might say, is the Lord Jesus. The servants are those who profess to be Christ's servants – professing Christians.

And as we have already seen, Christ has ascended to the right hand of the Father. He has gone away on a long journey and will be away for a long time. But when He left:

Ephesians 4:8 ESV Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

Now, we might apply this to all human beings in that God, in His common grace, gives gifts to everyone and expects at least *thanksgiving* from them. But it seems that the Lord's primary subjects in this parable are *professing Christians*. His servants.

You have been entrusted with Christ's property and so have I. What has He entrusted to us? Everything we have, really.

- Our money
- Our knowledge/education, our intellect
- Our influences and relationships

- Our Bibles – Holy Scripture in our hands
- Our homes and businesses
- Our abilities (we might say “talents,” which of course is a different use of “talents” than the money in the parable)
- Our employments and occupations
- Our natural creative abilities such as art, music...
- The strengths and qualities of our very personalities
- And even our recreational hobbies and skills
- And our own *souls*.

Christ has given us all these things, just as He entrusted His money (talents) to the three servants in the parable. They are all *his*. He has simply entrusted us with them while He is gone.

Given in Different Measure

“...to each according to his ability.” This is an important and encouraging truth. Christ does not require of us anything that is beyond our resources or abilities. He gifts us accordingly.

You do not have to compare yourself with others and feel that you don’t measure up because you aren’t able to

do what they do for the Lord. Paul warns us against this:

1 Corinthians 12:13-15 ESV For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (14) For the body does not consist of one member but of many. (15) If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body.

Different gifts and in differing amounts. *According to your ability*. Christ knows you intimately. He knows your abilities – He gave them to you after all! And therefore His gifts, and thus *his expectations of you*, correspond to your abilities. To the one He gave one talent, to the other two, and to the other five.

Different Measure but Given With Expectation of Use

It is amazing how often this principle is repeated by Christ. To whom much is given, much will be required.

John 15:2 ESV Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

Matthew 13:12 ESV For to the one

who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

Christ gifts us with gifts, but they are always given with the expectation that we will use those gifts for His glory. We are His servants, entrusted with what is His.

Consider this for example: *we have the Bible.* We have multiple copies of it. We have it on our computers. We have it preached and taught to us. *How are we employing it? What use are we making of it?* I have known people who claim to be Christians but they never read their Bible, they remain ignorant of it their entire lives, they cite all kinds of excuses for their negligence but none of those excuses will cut it when Christ comes. Others diligently use the Scriptures, striving to understand it more and more, and take opportunity to share its truths with others.

Or consider the gift of prayer. You can make your own application here. We all know, I believe, that each of us could make much better use of this gift.

Christ's gifts are given to us – the gospel is given to us – that we might put them to diligent employment for His glory and the building of His kingdom.

We Will all Give Account When He Returns

Matthew 25:19 ESV Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

And so it will be when Christ returns. Those who have faithfully employed the gifts entrusted to them will joyfully run to Him and show Him the profits. There will be no boasting – the gifts given were His after all.

How am I spending my life? *Spending. Second by second, minute by minute, hour by hour, I am spending the time given me.* How? How am I using the gifts Christ entrusted to me?

Great Reward for Christ's True People

Matthew 25:21 ESV 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.'

Christ's rewards for His true people – are always going to infinitely exceed anything we did for Him. Faithful in a little, but He puts us *over much*. Ryle quotes a man named Leighton:

“Here in this life some drops of joy enter into us, but there [in His presence] we shall enter into joy.”

Enter into the joy of your master. Into the presence of Christ Himself.

Psalms 16:11 ESV You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

The Unfaithful Servant

Now, in some ways I suppose this unfaithful and even wicked servant is a major part of the parable. Our Lord spends more words on this one than the other two in order to serve us with a sober warning.

Matthew 25:24-30 ESV 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 sown 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.’

I took the title of this sermon from J.C. Ryle. Listen to him again:

Let us leave this parable with a solemn determination by God’s grace, *never to be content with a profession of Christianity without practice. Let us not only talk about religion, but act. Let us not only feel the importance of religion, but do something too.* We are not told that the unprofitable servant was murderer, or a thief, or even a waster of the Lord’s money. *But he did nothing – and this was his ruin.* Let us beware of do-nothing Christianity... ‘To do no harm,’ says Baxter, ‘is the praise of a stone, not of a man.’”

Numbers of commentators on this parable have concluded and taught that all three servants *represent genuine Christians.* Even the last one. That unfaithful Christians like the third will

be chastised and disciplined when Christ comes, but nevertheless belong to Him.

This is not true and is made clear by Christ's judgment of the wicked servant:

(30) And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

He calls the man a "wicked and slothful servant." Clearly he was a false professor. He did not know Christ and Christ did not know him. All counterfeits will be exposed on that Day.

What was this wicked servant's reasoning? Well, his excuse was a lie. His excuse was typical of the wicked:

'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.'

He is actually blaming his master! He falsely accuses him of being "a hard man" and a grossly unjust and unfair despot. "You don't do any of the work.

You make others do it and then you rake in the profits they made." This kind of evil reasoning fills the news in our own day. "You made me afraid of what you would do to me if I lost the talent." So he puts all the blame on his master.

This suggestion bespeaks [*is an example of*] the common reproach which wicked people cast upon God, as if all the blame of their sin and ruin lay at his door....God does not demand brick, and deny straw; no, whatever is required in the covenant, is promised in the covenant; so that if we perish, it is owing to ourselves. [Matthew Henry]

These are lies. Evil lies. They are uttered by a wicked man who hates Christ. "I have no obligation to serve you. Take your talent back."

In the history of the church, and in our own experience today, while the parable has one in three servants being evil, the fact is that the proportion of wicked ones is much higher. *Most people who claim to be Christians bury their talent in the ground and entertain low and unjust views of Christ.*

Here is Matthew Henry again:

The unfaithful servant was he that had but *one* talent: doubtless there are many that have five talents, and bury them all; great abilities, great advantages, and yet do no good with them: but Christ would hint to us, (1.) That if he that had but one talent, be reckoned with thus for burying that one, much more will they be accounted offenders, that have more, that have many, and bury them. If he that was but of small capacity, was cast into utter darkness because he did not improve what he had as he might have done, *of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, that tramples underfoot the greatest advantages?*

(2.) That those who have least to do for God, frequently do least of what they have to do. Some make it an excuse for their laziness, that they have not the opportunities of serving God that others have; and because they have not wherewithal to do what they say they would, they will not do what we are sure they can, and so sit down and do nothing; it is really an aggravation of their sloth, that when they have but one talent to take care about, they neglect that one.

He hid his *lord's* money; had it been his *own*, he might have done as he pleased; but, whatever abilities and advantages

we have, they are not our *own*, we are but stewards of them, and must give account to our Lord, whose goods they are. It was an aggravation of his slothfulness, that his fellow-servants were busy and successful in trading, and their zeal should have provoked his. Are others active, and shall we be idle?

This servant thought that his account would pass well enough, because he could say, *There you have what is yours*. “Lord, I was no spendthrift of my estate, no prodigal of my time, no profaner of my sabbaths, no opposer of good ministers and good preaching; Lord, I never ridiculed my bible, nor set my wits to work to banter religion, nor abused my power to persecute any good man; I never drowned my parts [in liquor] nor wasted God's good creatures in drunkenness and gluttony, nor ever to my knowledge did I injury to any body.” Many that are called Christians, build great hopes for heaven upon their being able to make such an account; yet all this amounts to no more than *there, you have what is yours*, as if no more were required, or could be expected.

May none of us be found to be that wicked servant on that Day when our Master, long absent, returns.