

Matthew 25:14-30

This Parable of the Talents is another one that Jesus told at the end of His earthly ministry. He was about to be betrayed and arrested, crucified, and buried. He would arise on the third day, and we know that he then ascended into heaven. Before this happened he gave us an assurance that he would return and welcome us home, but in the meanwhile, we should prepare ourselves for His return.

As we are soon to enter into the season of Advent, a time when we consciously think about waiting for coming again in glory, we should also take the time to be sure to be ready. He has given us the task of being witnesses and proclaiming the Kingdom. Each of us has a part to play and the gifts of the Spirit are given in various measures to help us perform these tasks.

So just like the story of the 10 bridesmaids last week, this parable tells us to be ready. There are rewards given to those who are doing as they were commanded. But there is also the threat of punishment for those who are not. We must remember that Jesus is talking specifically to His disciples, This is not a call for the world to prepare for His coming, but as disciples it is also a reminder that just like the third servant we have to act out and live our faith. Just because you are in the church building is not enough. We need to show our faith by what we do.

Parables are stories which are common to everyday life. Here, the parable talks about the conduct of business. It was common for the owner of an estate to entrust others to manage it. The owner gave some basic instructions of what he wanted done and the outcome he desired. He also provided the means, by which this business could be transacted. In this case, the master provided his servants with an enormous amount of capital. A talent was about seventy pounds of either silver or gold. So even the slave who got one talent was entrusted with something of significant value.

There are always risks involved in business. Bad investments can be made. Many businesses fail and end in bankruptcy. But the first two slaves assumed the risk and doubled the investment. However, the third slave was afraid and buried the talent. He was afraid that if he invested it that he might lose it and face the wrath of the master. He was even too afraid to put it in the bank to earn interest.

I think it is important at this point also to remind ourselves that Jesus is not giving instructions on how to put money to work is the same way that the Parable of the Sower is not a lesson on agriculture. This makes the failure of the third slave clearer. He was afraid to share the Gospel because He feared personal harm even more than He feared his master. The master was indeed severe. After all, He represents God, and God has high expectations, but He also provides lavishly for our success. We must have faith that God desires our success and not our failure. His desire is to reward us rather than to punish us. Often people who don't believe see God more as an arbitrary judge who desires nothing more than to punish failure, rather than see Him as the generous and

loving Father that we know. An unbeliever can be terrified of God because of this, and maybe this is who that third servant represents? He was the one with the one talent, digging it up to return it to his master. He thought that at least he would not be punished as much, because he didn't lose the money, he thought that was safer than failing in his work and sacrificing it. In his mind, he had been a good steward of the Lord's money. He had kept it safe. How shocked he must have been when he was utterly condemned as evil and slothful, and then sent into outer darkness. He had heard how the other two slaves had doubled their investment. He had heard the words of commendation: "Well done! Enter into the Joy of the Lord." Entering into the joy of the Lord has the connotation that they would sit at the high table with their master. This was not usual practice for a slave. They never ate at the table. After they had served the master and his guests, they could quietly eat the leftovers in a side room. So this part of the story indicates a change of status, they were no longer slaves, instead they became the master's honoured guests.

The foolish slave did not expect this kind of treatment. But he thought he could at least remain a slave and eat the crumbs left from the master's table. This is similar to those who don't know whether they will get to Heaven or not, they can't believe that they might sit at the captain's table in the presence of God. They want to just sneak into heaven as invisibly as possible and to stay that way. It is good enough to avoid hellfire, they think. But look what happened to the servant in this story, #outerdarkness!

It's important to remember that none of this is done by our own good work, even the most faithful slave has no right to the Master's table. It is entirely by the grace of the master that these two faithful slaves attained this status. Our faith in Jesus Christ gets us there. We are saved by grace through faith, and not by our works, as Paul tells us in Ephesians.

At the last supper as Jesus shared with the disciples, he explained that through His sacrificial death we have been elevated to being his friends. We know Jesus will judge the living and the dead. But faith assures us that His saving grace will save us. He has shown the greatest love for us. No greater love has been demonstrated than by Jesus, as He laid down his own life for that of His friends. Such great love assures us that He will bring us to that table,

So this parable like so many others operates at many different levels, it's about being ready, about using what we have been given to our best ability, and it's about the confidence that we can have in knowing Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. Thanks be to God. Amen.