

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 25 (PART 2)

Jesus continues teaching about the coming of the kingdom and the return of the master. The previous parable emphasized being prepared for the bridegroom. This parable emphasizes being faithful with what the master has entrusted while he is away.

Matthew 25:14-30 - Parable Of The Talents

What's a "talent"? A talent was not originally a skill or ability, but a very large unit of money. In the ancient world a single talent represented an enormous sum, roughly 15–20 years of wages for a laborer. So the amounts entrusted in the story are extremely significant and thus the master is entrusting his servants with great responsibility.

The assignment: The servants are expected to steward & manage what belongs to the master while he is away. They don't own the money but instead are managers of what belongs to someone else.

Key phrases:

v. 15 - "each according to his own ability" - The master distributes different amounts to different servants. In a similar way, we are reminded that God doesn't give the same assignments/responsibilities to everyone. The point is not comparison, but that we ought to be faithful with what we have been given.

Q – Why do you think the master gave different amounts?

Q - How does comparison affect you and your walk of faith?

Some possible temptations:

- Jealousy of what others have or are doing
- Discouragement: feeling our contribution doesn't matter b/c someone else appears more gifted or successful.
- Pride, lack of compassion and possibly bitterness towards others who are "weaker"
- Avoidance of responsibility: thinking "someone else can do it better," so we don't step into the opportunities God has given us.
- Insecurity: believing we're inadequate or unqualified to serve because others seem more capable.

Comparison distracts us from the real question God asks of us. The question isn't 'Did you receive the same amount as someone else?' The question is 'Were you faithful with what I entrusted to you?' Some servants received five talents, some two, and some one. Yet the master says the exact same words to the first two servants: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

v. 16 - "immediately" - The servant with five talents acts right away. There is initiative and eagerness. Good and faithful servants are not passive or lazy. They move quickly to act on what the master has entrusted. They trust that what the master has asked of them is something that they can accomplish and that they can trust the master's command.

Q - what are the benefits of obeying immediately? What stops us from immediately obeying?

v. 18 - went away, dug a hole - there is effort involved, but a different kind - a self-reliant effort that doesn't involve risk. Self protection, safety. It wasn't that he did nothing, it's that he did his own thing. And for a few reasons we will explore.

The actions (and words) of this servant shows they have a very different relationship or understanding of their master. **1:** "knew you were hard man" (v. 24), **2:** "afraid" (v. 25), **3:** "see what I have is yours" (v. 25).

1 - "I knew you were a hard man" (v. 24)

The word "hard" (σκληρός *skleros*, <4642>) means harsh, rough, strict. The third servant claims he believed the master was demanding and difficult to satisfy. In his mind, the master is someone who demands results but gives no mercy if things go wrong.

But is that comment true or an expression of the third servant's opinion? From the parable itself we learn a little about the master that should help us with this. First, the master had already shown trust in these three servants by entrusting large sums of money to the servants. Sure, the third servant receives a smaller amount, but one talent is still of significant value. Secondly, the master also shows generosity in his rewards: "Enter into the joy of your master." He doesn't say: "you have done what was required of you" or "Good. Now get back to work!" or "You have earned your wages or done what I expected".

Instead, the master celebrates the servants and shares *his* joy with them. This implies relationship, celebration and closeness. If the "joy" was replaced with a piece of beef - the master is saying, "come join me at my table for filet mignon!" as opposed to "Good work, I'll be sending you a voucher for you to pick up some ground chuck at the store."

So, while the servant says "I knew you to be a hard man", the servant doesn't actually know what his master is really like. And his actions are based on a false understanding of his master - one of harshness and punishment rather than knowing that his master was actually good, and believed that the servant *could* steward what he had given. And that brings us to the next confession of servant #3.

2 - "Afraid" (v. 25)

Because the servant misunderstood the character of his master, he was motivated by fear. He says, "*I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground.*" Instead of trusting the master and faithfully stewarding what had been entrusted to him, he chose the safest option → doing nothing. Fear led him to protect himself rather than serve his master.

In the same way, a distorted view of God can lead to spiritual paralysis. When someone believes God is harsh, impossible to please, or only waiting to punish failure, they may withdraw rather than step forward in faith. They may obey, but not because they love God. Instead they obey hoping that God will love them if they do the right things. This isn't to imply we should not fear God, for other kinds of problems arise when we trivialize the Creator of all things. But God is not a "harsh man" that inspires us to take action based on being afraid of him.

1 John 4:18-19 (ESV) - There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 19 We love because he first loved us.

3 - "see what I have is yours"

The servant also believed that the master would be okay with his own interpretation of the assignment. From the servant's own words, it seems that he had convinced himself that the master would be pleased

with the servant's own take on what he was commanded to do. When the master returns, the third servant says, almost proudly: *"Look, here is your money back (25:25, NLT)"*. But the master is not pleased with this. On top of what we have already discussed, something really important is being illustrated by this final element of the third servant's approach.

During the master's time away, the 3rd servant has convinced himself that what he was doing was what the master had asked. Because of not knowing the character of God, because of fear, and because of isolation & hiding, there can be a *slow fade* of sorts in the heart of a disciple. We start out knowing what our Lord has commanded - clearly and without variation. But then over time because we are disobedient, we begin to question and rationalize our disobedience and the original command (cp. the serpent *"did God really say..."* in Genesis 3). And then, to relieve our conviction, we convince ourselves that what we are doing is "not bad". "At least partial obedience is better than outright disobedience...*right?*"

The assignment was to steward the money that the servant was entrusted with & by implication the stewarding wasn't just holding it for safe keeping, but to invest & grow it. The master's response is telling: "why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it. (v. 27 (NLT))

The servant had convinced himself that his actions, based on fear and self-determination were going to be acceptable or at least understandable by his master. They were not.

Here are some real life examples of the "slow fade":

Example: Sexual purity

1. TRUTH: "I know Scripture is clear about sexual purity."
2. "But this relationship feels different."
3. "We're serious about each other."
4. "We're probably going to get married anyway."
5. FINAL BELIEF: "This isn't really wrong—it's just part of our relationship."

Example: Bitterness & Unforgiveness

1. TRUTH: "Jesus tells us to forgive."
2. "But what they did was really hurtful."
3. "I just need some time."
4. "They haven't even apologized."
5. FINAL BELIEF: "I'm not bitter—I just don't want anything to do with them."

Example: Entertainment & Media

1. TRUTH: "I should guard what I put in my mind."
2. "But this is just a show." or "I know it's not great but it's really funny/exciting"
3. "It's not like I'm doing these things."
4. "Everyone watches stuff like this." or "It's how I relax at the end of the day"
5. FINAL BELIEF: "It's really not affecting me."

Example: Neglecting spiritual life

1. TRUTH: "I need to stay in Scripture and prayer."
2. "I'm just really busy this week."
3. "Things will slow down soon."
4. "Listening to a sermon is basically the same."
5. FINAL BELIEF: "God knows my heart."

Example: Anger & Irritability

1. TRUTH: "I know I should be patient and gracious with people."
2. "But I'm just under a lot of stress right now." or "People are being really difficult."
3. "I'm just venting" or "I didn't mean it like that."
4. "I'm just being honest about how I feel." or "If *they* didn't act that way, I wouldn't react like this."
5. FINAL BELIEF: "That's just my personality."

Well Done Good & Faithful Servant

Here is how the parable ends, similar to the parable of the bridegroom above. In the previous parable, you are either a wise and watchful virgin, prepared with extra oil and ready to enter the wedding celebration, or you are a foolish and unprepared virgin who is not allowed in. In this parable, you are either a good and faithful servant, who receives commendation and enters into "the joy of his master," (think celebration and light) or you are cast into "outer darkness", where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (a phrase Matthew uses 6x).

Matthew 25:19 tells us that there is a settling of accounts when the master returns. The servants *expect* to give an account for what they did with what they were given. Remember, what they were stewarding was never theirs to begin with, so it is appropriate, perhaps even fair, for the master to inquire and evaluate how they handled what had been entrusted to them. This idea appears elsewhere in Scripture: "So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God." (Romans 14:12)

This raises an important question for us: **What has our Master entrusted to us to steward while we wait for His return, and how are we stewarding what He has given?**

Our lives, our bodies, our time, our abilities, our resources, our relationships, our weaknesses, our limitations, the gospel, spiritual gifts, opportunities to serve...

This parable highlights the phrase "*Well done, good and faithful servant*", one of the most glorious phrases in Scripture. Many people rightly think of this as a summary of the goal of the Christian life, to hear these words at the end of our lives. But it is important to remember that the master did not say this simply because the servants belonged to him, or because their time of service had ended. He said it because they were faithful with what had been entrusted to them. In the same way, this is not a phrase that is spoken over every person simply because they have died. It's said to those who are servants who do, who do well, who are good, and most importantly are faithful.

So the question for us is this: What has Jesus Christ given to you that he expects you to steward, manage, and care for while he is "on a journey," and for which you will give an account when He returns?

Get to know who your master is, and also what he is like. He has entrusted his affairs to you, and while that responsibility can sometimes feel daunting, remember that he gave each servant according to their ability. He knows what you are capable of, even more than you do! Believe what is true about who he is and what he is like, and remember that the master who entrusted you with these things believes you can faithfully steward what he has given. He believes in you too.