



FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP

Pastor Dillon Barber // August 25, 2024

Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Big Idea: As servants of the Lord, we are called to invest our time, talents and treasures for kingdom work.

We are continuing our summer series on the Parables this morning with another familiar parable, the parable of the Talents in Matthew 25. This is another parable about stewarding our money and our resources, though we are going to see that the principles apply to many other aspects of our life than just money. I want to pause for just a moment and clarify something. These last few weeks of parables have focused on money and stewardship and I don't want anyone to think that we are trying to hound you guys for more money or more donations or send subliminal messages that we are facing financial hardship and that's why we chose these parables. Jesus talked about money many times and we intentionally chose parables that cover a variety of subjects and it is super refreshing for us to be able to teach these parables from a place of health and financial stability in our church. God has been faithful to our church and you have been generous and we have had a good summer and we are healthy. I promise that if anything changes we will be honest and up front with you and tell you all what is going on. It is such a blessing to be able to stand here and wrestle with a text like this knowing how generous our congregation is and to be part of a church that is stewarding its resources well. So great job and we are richly blessed.

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 25. Our text today comes toward the end of what we call the Olivet Discourse. In the beginning of the passion week Jesus took his disciples out of Jerusalem and up onto the Mount of Olives overlooking the city and he had a long conversation with them. He shared with them all kinds of things about end times stuff and the challenges that the world will face. Some of the signs of the end of the age are revealed and he taught three parables about what his followers are supposed to be doing while they wait for the return of the Son of Man. The first is about the Wise and Foolish Servants, in Ch. 24 and then the parable of the Ten Virgins in the beginning of chapter 25 and then

the Parable of the Talents which is our parable for today. Let's take a look the first part of the parable. (Read verses 14-18).

This parable is a story from common every day life. It would have been quite normal for a land owner or wealthy businessman to leave home for a long journey and entrust his estate to his servants. The most trusted servants and managers would be given financial resources to manage the estate while the master was gone. A Talent was a unit of measurement used to measure weight or the value of coins. A talent in financial terms was a vast sum of money, equal to 20 years of wages for a laborer. So five talents would be 100 years of wages. Lots of money. Jesus uses this common story to teach spiritual truth and in this case the parable is an allegory and we can learn a lot from it about Jesus and the church and what we are supposed to be doing.

First of all we are reminded that Jesus is the creator and he owns everything. All the world and all that it contains belongs to him. Look at Colossians 1:15-20. Speaking of Jesus, Paul writes: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." Jesus created it all, sustains it all, and it all belongs to him. Psalm 89:11 "The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it, you have founded them."

In our human condition and in our human perspective we often think that our money and our resources belong to us. I worked hard, I earned it, I paid for it with my own money, it's mine. That is usually our attitude. Well, this parable reminds us that God owns everything and if it is our possession it's on loan from God. If all of creation belongs to God,

shouldn't we be careful about how we use and take care of his stuff? If you have ever borrowed someone else's car, you know the feeling of wanting to take good care of something that isn't yours. You want that car to be returned clean and with a full tank of gas and absolutely no dents or scratches. Well, we are all borrowing God's car so to speak. It's all his, and we get to use and steward his things well.

Secondly we are reminded that Jesus is the master and we are his servants. The Greek word for servant is *doulos*. It means slave or bond servant or simply servant. In human terms *doulos* can describe a person who is owned by another human. A slave in its truest sense. Slaves have no personal autonomy, no control over their lives or futures, they are commanded and they obey. There were some in Jewish culture that indentured themselves to others for a period of time, becoming slaves for a set number of years in order to pay off debt or earn a living. These were called bondservants. And God allowed this because it was mutually beneficial for all parties and it was intended to be temporary. The New Testament also speaks of servants, both high ranking and lowly, who worked in the households of others or in public office. These were called *Doulos* as well. The New Testament uses all of these meanings for *doulos*. When it comes to Christians and our relationship to Christ, we are his *doulos*. He owns us, he is our master and we are no longer our own but belong to him. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Paul speaking about sexual purity reminds the church: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." Jesus purchased us from sin and death with his own blood. We belong to him.

To be a servant who is beholden to the will of a master is not very popular in our culture today. And rightly so. Slavery is terrible. However, today, it seems like any concept of surrendering our autonomy and freedom and submitting our will to the will of another is abhorrent in our culture. I want to be the master of myself, control my own destiny. I'm going to do it my way, don't tell me what to do or define me. I'll define myself and (by

the way) my truth is the truth. That's our culture today. That's human nature. I want to be my own god and my own master and do whatever I want. Would you agree? Is that our human nature? I feel like we are seeing more and more of this in our country. Maybe that means I'm getting old. I don't know.

The Bible has a different view. God is in charge and he is good, loving, kind, compassionate, just, steady and unchanging. He wants what is best for us and when we submit to his leadership and lordship it goes better every time. Jesus is the master and we are his servants, his doulos and it is much better this way.

Next we learn that God gives to his servants according to each one's ability and capacity. In the parable, the master calls his servants and gives each one large sums of money. But notice the phrase: "To each according to his ability." I know this parable is about money but the principle applies to other aspects of life and abilities as well. We like to refer to our resources as time, talent and treasure. God has gifted each one of us with skills, giftings, talents whatever you want to call them, to each one of us according to our ability and capacity. We are each fearfully and wonderfully made. To some God has given more talent and to others he has given less. Some have worked hard to cultivate their talents and skills and others haven't. It is always fun to watch the Olympics and see athletes who have worked so hard to cultivate their talents and they do amazing things. Even more exciting when they step off the podium and give glory to God for everything they have achieved. That happened a few times this summer.

What are your talents? Do you know? Do you know your spiritual giftings? Your strength? How has God wired you specifically for his purposes and kingdom work? Have you taken the time to cultivate and sharpen those talents so that you can use them to the best of your ability? Every season is a good season to practice using the talents and abilities that God has given you for his kingdom.

This brings us to our next point. The faithful servant invests what is given for kingdom purposes. Let's look at the next section. Verses 19-23.

Jesus is the master, he owns it all, we are his servants and he gives us abilities, talents and treasures each according to his will and plan. Our job is to invest those things for kingdom purposes. How are we doing with this step church? Do you feel like you are using your gifts, talents, treasure, time to invest in kingdom stuff? Maybe you are in a season of life where you are just trying to survive. That's ok. We have all been in those seasons and its ok. This is no supposed to be a guilt trip. But sometimes we are just in the habit of putting one foot in front of the other and we aren't thinking about how we can be used by God to do the kingdom work he has for us. In this parable, two of the servants take the talents they are given and invest them wisely and multiply what they have for their master and it is greatly rewarding.

The reward comes in two ways. The first reward is greater opportunity to serve and bless and empower the work of the kingdom. Jesus said well done good and faithful servant. Gosh how I long to hear those words don't you? Well done. You are a good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little. I will set you over much.

Notice that Jesus didn't say anything about bigger mansions in heaven or more jewels in your crown. Sometimes we get the idea that the reward for doing God's work in this life will be an eternal vacation in luxury in the next life. That we will sit around all day in our mansions in heaven sipping wine and eating cheese and go to a worship concert every evening or something. That's not what this parable is saying. The first reward for investing God's resources in God's kingdom business is a greater opportunity to do the work God give you and to make a greater impact on the kingdom. And guess what, we don't have to wait until heaven to experience this reward. Right now, if you are faithful to do what God has set before you, he will bless you and give you more opportunity to be a blessing. That's the first reward.

The second reward is to enter into the joy of the Lord. To enter into the master's joy is to experience God's delight in his children and to share in his goodness. When we use the gifts God has given us to do the work God has set before us we experience a joy and satisfaction deeper than anything the world has to offer. True joy is found in doing what God has designed us and called us to do. And again, we don't have to wait until heaven to experience this kind of joy.

This summer the Leadership board asked me to draft a policy for college scholarships for students who are pursuing vocational ministry. Students that want to be pastors or missionaries. And policies are useful, they gives us guidelines but I'm not the best at writing these sorts of things. So I pounded out a page or two of ideas and I sent it off to one of the other board members. He's an engineer and his brain works very differently than mine and he took my mess of ideas and turned them into a really clear and direct and well ordered document. He changed every single word that I wrote and made it better. After our board meeting he said it was the most fun thing that he has done as a board member. Using his talents and gifting and really smart brain to help our church better equip the next generation of leaders and experiencing unique joy while doing it. That is just one small example.

You know you are walking in step with God's plan and his will when you are using the gifts he has given you to bless others and you experienced the fullness of joy while doing it. That is a rich reward. To know you are doing what God designed you to do and blessing others in the process is one of the best things in life.

Now let's look at the contrast with the unfaithful servant. (Read verses 24-30).

The unfaithful servant misses out on all of God's blessings. I have four observations about the unfaithful servant.

1. The unfaithful servant blames God. This third servant clearly does not trust God or trust his character so he blames God for his failure to invest his talents well. I think we do this all the time. We blame God for our shortcomings instead of thanking him for our gifts. God if you had just made me smarter, better organized, more creative, more athletic, whatever it is, God if you had just made me better I would be able to do more. So it's God's fault, not my fault.

I'm not sure it works that way. Remember we are each fearfully and wonderfully made. Each of us is responsible to use what we are given, whether that's a little or a lot, to do God's kingdom work. And remember, you are never too young or too old to do God's work. There is no retiring from kingdom ministry. Ministry might look different as we age, but we never retire. We are servants for life.

2. After blaming God, the unfaithful servant acts out of fear instead of confidence. He said "I was afraid, so I hid your talent in the ground." Instead of using his treasure he buried his treasure. Please don't let fear get in the way of doing God's work. Fear of failure, fear of people, fear of letting God down, fear of ridicule or rejection, fear that you won't have enough if you give your money, any or all of those things can prevent us from stepping up and doing God's work. Don't let fear take you out. If God has called you he will equip you to do all that he asks. Philippians 4:19 "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen."

3. Even what the unfaithful servant has will be taken away and given to another. The master told his servants to take the one talent away and give it to the servant with ten talents. The cost of squandering your opportunity will be the loss of opportunity. If you constantly tell God no, if you regularly refuse the opportunity to love, serve, bless, give, and be used by God, he will give you fewer and fewer opportunities and you will miss out on the joy that is promised.

4. Lastly, the unfaithful servant will be cast out from God's presence. Literally driven out into the darkness. I want to highlight the contrast here between how the master treats the faithful servant and the unfaithful servant. Remember the second reward is the invitation to "enter in" to the master's joy. It is an invitation to come in and enjoy all that the Lord has, to enjoy his closeness and intimacy, and experience his fullness in your life, both now and forever. Contrast here with the command to cast out and drive out the unfaithful servant. Out of the home, out of the town, out of the fellowship with the Master and into the darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

I don't think that this parable teaches that people will lose their salvation if they don't tithe or volunteer in Sunday school. I really don't think that is the lesson. But I do think that there are people all across the world, and even sitting in churches who think they are Christians but there is no fruit or evidence in their life to prove it. Those people will be sorely surprised when the master returns. I believe that's the point of this last verse in the parable.

Conclusion: What are the key takeaways of this parable? Jesus is the master and we are his servants. He left us here to do his work, his ministry with the help of the Holy Spirit while he is gone. Some day he will return and we will each give an account of what we have done with the time, talent and treasure he has given to us. When we are faithful with what we have been given we will be given even greater opportunity to serve and do his work. And we will experience the fullness of joy in doing what we are each called to do. In contrast if we blame God, live in fear, and fail to do what he has called us to, we will miss out on the joy and opportunity to grow and be used by God.

Application: So where are you at in this journey?

Are you submitting to God's authority and plan for your life? Do you recognize that Jesus is your lord and leader and you are following him?

Do you know the gifts, talents and abilities that he has given you and when you have the opportunity to use those talents, are you using them for his kingdom and for his glory?

Are you trusting God with your finances and honoring him with your wealth and resources to enable and empower ministry?

Are you experiencing the joy of giving, serving, and loving with the gifts

Are you frozen by fear and watching from the sideline? Maybe you are afraid to jump in and be used by God. Don't be afraid. Whatever God is calling you to he will empower you and equip you to do it. Maybe it's serving in a ministry in church, maybe its reaching out to a neighbor who needs encouragement, maybe its making time to minister to your kids or step kids, maybe its taking care of a loved one or aging parent. If God is calling you to serve he will give you what you need to serve and fill you with joy as you use his gifts to bless others.