

Sermon: Matthew 25:14-30 - “Good and Faithful Servants”

Preached on July 2nd, 2023

Image Church, Atlanta

(Welcome and Intro myself and FTG)

Any announcements? (Kids camp success?)

INTRO:

Seems like I’m always up here during a holiday weekend (last year it was Thanksgiving, earlier this year was Memorial Day, this time is 4th of July weekend). I think I’m gonna start calling myself “The Holiday Preacher” or how about “Holi-Jose” (has a nice ring to it, no?)

Anyway, it IS a Holiday weekend. This week we will celebrate Independence Day on the 4th of July. A day set aside to commemorate the day back in 1776 when the United States became its own independent nation. No longer under the rule and reign, or dependence upon the Kingdom of England.

While Independence was great from a national standpoint, from a human perspective, independence has always been an interesting concept to me.

You see, all of us think we want independence. We start looking for it at a very early age.

[Example Luca: “My do it...”]

But the reality is humanity was not created for independence.

In fact, even though the scientific community and secular world does not like to admit it, our very breath is dependent upon something outside of ourselves.

So the concept of “independence” at least from a personal perspective, is a secular belief. Not a Christian one.

You see as Christians, we believe that our whole life is dependent on the Creator and sustainer of all things, Christ Jesus, our Lord.

This morning I want to unpack what dependence on God looks like and how we’re to take care of and “steward” the things that God has allowed His creatures to borrow and use.

We are continuing our sermon series through the core values of our church. And I get to share about our core value of stewardship.

Here is our definition of stewardship on our website:

“We believe that everything that’s been given to us is a gift from God and that it is our responsibility to steward our gifts for the glory of God. We want to be a church that leverages our time, talent, and treasure through love, service, hospitality, and generosity for the sake of our church family and for our neighbors.”

With that said, let’s read our passage this morning...

Matthew 25:14-30 (Hear the Word of the Lord)

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

14 “For it is just like a man about to go on a journey. He called his own servants and entrusted his possessions to them. 15 To one he gave five talents, to another two talents, and to another one talent, depending on each one’s ability. Then he went on a journey.

Immediately 16 the man who had received five talents went, put them to work, and earned five more. 17 In the same way the man with two earned two more. 18 But the man who had received one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master’s money.

19 “After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received five talents approached, presented five more talents, and said, ‘Master, you gave me five talents. See, I’ve earned five more talents.’ 21 “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master’s joy.’

22 “The man with two talents also approached. He said, ‘Master, you gave me two talents. See, I’ve earned two more talents.’ 23 “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master’s joy.’

24 “The man who had received one talent also approached and said, ‘Master, I know you. You’re a harsh man, reaping where you haven’t sown and gathering where you haven’t scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’

26 “His master replied to him, ‘You evil, lazy servant! If you knew that I reap where I haven’t sown and gather where I haven’t scattered, 27 then you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and I would have received my money back with interest when I returned. 28 “ ‘So take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten talents. 29 For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough. But from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 30 And throw this good-for-nothing servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Background and context:

This parable is spoken by Jesus towards the end of (what theologians call) the “Olivet Discourse.” It starts in Matthew 24 and it is a prophecy (one of them longest) that Jesus gives as He stood on the Mount of Olives overlooking the temple in Jerusalem.

And it’s important to note that this parable is given during this prophecy because I think what it’ll show us is that the parable doesn’t have as much to do with what we do with our money, as much as what we do with our lives.

So before we get deeper into unpacking our parable this morning, let me explain what’s happening in Matthew 24.

In Matthew 24 Jesus gave a warning that the very center of their Jewish world was going to be destroyed.

He says in Matt 24:2, *“Do you see all these things? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here on another that will not be thrown down.”*

This starts the narrative for our parable this morning.

They then ask him 3 questions:

- When will these things happen
- What will be the sign of your coming
- and of the end of the age:

...and he answers them by talking about:

- How the temple would be destroyed,
- How there would be famines, and earthquakes
- He talks about the great tribulation
- About this event called the “coming of the Son of Man”
- And a bunch of apocalyptic things...

He then says in Matthew 24:36

36 “Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels of heaven nor the Son—except the Father alone.”

And finally he says in verse 45:

*“45 **“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give them food at the proper time? 46 Blessed is that servant whom the master finds doing his job when he comes.** 47 Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 48 But if that wicked servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delayed,’ 49 and starts to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with drunkards, 50 that servant’s master will come on a day **he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know.** 51 He will cut*

him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

If I can paraphrase Jesus, He says, “I’m going away and I’m going to return again. **BE PREPARED** because you **WON’T KNOW** when I return... but **WHEN I DO**, things are gonna get crazy.”

I felt I needed to go through this because (again) if we’re going to look at this passage as a guide to what “Stewardship” looks like, then we need to see that stewardship is NOT about tithing or about being good with your money. It’s so much deeper than that. I hope to show you that this morning.

Now let’s go to our story today...

The dictionary’s definition of steward: is “*someone who looks after (manages) the property of another.*”

The parable of the Talents affirms that definition.

It starts by saying that the Kingdom of God will be like:

*14 “...a man about to go on a journey. He called his own servants and entrusted **his possessions** to them.”*

I know we all like to think that the things we have in this world are ours... (“My” house, “My” car, “My” children, “My” wife, “My” family, “My” job, “My” life). We were born with that idea right? For all you parents out there... I’m sure you never had to teach your children how to say “Mine!?”

We all live with the notion that WE are in control of our lives, of our money, of everything. But Jesus says here that we’ve been entrusted with **HIS possessions.**

In the book of Genesis, Adam and Eve were put in the garden to SHARE in God’s creation. They didn’t create it. It was God’s and it has ALWAYS belonged to Him... But when sin entered the world that truth was flipped on its head and now we think, we own everything. We went from dependence to independence.

But this is false independence... (verse 15)

*“15 To one **he gave** five talents, to another two talents, and to another one talent, depending on each one’s ability. “*

Notice it says, “HE gave” (Again, you don’t have anything unless it was first given to you.)

Last week Pastor Aaron shared an example where it would be impossible for him to give us shares in the Atlanta Braves, because they don't belong to him... However, God CAN give anything because everything belongs to Him.

So whether we like to admit it or not, NOTHING in this world is ours. Everything is borrowed.

This is God's house. This is God's universe. Everything is a gift from God.

I love that song we sing that says, "It's your breath in our lungs so we pour out our praise to you only!"

NOTHING is ours... We're all just Stewards of God's things.

Managers... of HIS property.

Let's keep reading... It says he gave them each (these things called) "Talents."

A "talent" was a unit of measure in weight... Think about it in "pounds." The best way to relate a "talent" in today's world is to think about a solid gold bar.

According to historians, one talent weighed approximately 100 lbs of gold.

In Jesus' day one talent would've been worth about 20 years of wages for a laborer.

And in this parable it says that one of them is given 5 TALENTS! (500 lbs of Gold!)

First of all, how do you carry all of that? And 2nd, that was a LOT of money to be trusted with!

Think about that... 20 years of wages times 5... That's 100 years worth of a person's wages!

But what's interesting (and we'll come back to this) is that in verse 21 it reads:

*"You were faithful over **a few things**; I will put you in charge of many things"*

Listen to that... 20 years worth of wages is considered "a few things" in God's economy.

What does this tell us about our perspective vs God's perspective when it comes to "things..." or the value we put on things?

We would all consider 500 lbs of Gold a FORTUNE! God sees it as "a few things."

But that's consistent with who God is, right?!

Afterall, the Scriptures say “He owns the cattle on a thousand Hills.” “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof!”

If those things are all true of God, then OF COURSE 500 lbs of Gold are just “a few things.”

A quick point of application to take from this is that

We need to change the way we view things to the way God views things!

No matter how big you think your circumstance or challenges might seem to you, those things are small, tiny, MINISCULE from God’s perspective.

Not small in terms of importance. Small meaning, HE CAN HANDLE OUR PROBLEMS!

That’s why John Piper wrote: **“God made man small and the universe big to say something about himself.” -John Piper, From the book “Don’t Waste Your Life”**

But let’s keep reading...

Jesus says that the master set off on a journey and gives each of them talents *“depending on each one’s ability.”* (This will be important later on).

The first two servants receive 5 and 2 talents respectively... and they wasted no time in putting their master’s money to work. And when the master returned they had doubled the Master’s money.

But the one who received one talent decided to bury and hide his master’s money.

I want to spend the rest of our time talking more about this man than the other two. Because his response in this story is central to understanding biblical stewardship.

*24 “The man who had received one talent also approached and said, ‘Master, **I know you. You’re a harsh man,** reaping where you haven’t sown and gathering where you haven’t scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’*

You see, the 3rd servant’s response, (both his actions and his verbal response) were based on his view of His Master.

Listen to the servant’s perception of the master.

***I know you.** You’re a harsh man. Reaping where you haven’t sown and gathering where you haven’t scattered seed.*

Someone who reaps where they haven't sown or gathers where they haven't scattered is either a bully or a thief. Yet he starts off by saying, "I know you."

But what He's REALLY saying with his actions is, I don't know you.

He's saying "I didn't care to do anything for you because the truth is, I don't want to work for you, because you're not my master."

Instead of taking accountability for his actions, he attacks the Master's character.

He blames his Master. Because he never really KNEW his master.

There are a few times when you see Jesus really go out of His way to show what is displeasing to God... This is one of those times.

There are two things that Jesus implies that the Master is upset about:

1. That he did NOTHING with the task he was given.

What's NOT written here but is written in a similar parable in Luke 19, is that the servants were supposed to put the talents to use. If the Master didn't want anything done with the talents he could've put them in a bank or hid the talents himself. The implication is that the servants would DO something with what they were given. This servant did NOTHING!

In fact his audacity goes so far as to blame the master for his own laziness and selfishness.

2. That the servant has a poor perception of the Master's character.

His actions and His words show that He doesn't really know the Master at all.

If we're going to have a Biblical understanding stewardship, we HAVE to realize that our perception of our Master will dictate our behavior.

As we say all the time, you do what you believe.

But how do we know even from this passage that the Master was not the type of man that the servant was accusing him of being?

- He put his trust in them. (verse 14)
 - Remember, we're talking about 20 years worth of wages here.
- In verse 15 (I said this would be important later) He took time to understand each of their abilities.
 - He didn't burden them with things that they couldn't handle.
- In verse 19 we're told that He left them with his things for a long time.

- IDK about you but if I would've left someone in charge of that much of my money, I would NOT have left them for too long. But in verse 19 Jesus goes out of his way to say "After a long time" he came back to settle accounts.

So he's NOT the guy that the servant says he is.

The servant just didn't want to do anything for the master. Because He didn't really "know" him, even though he says he did.

The first 2 servants obviously knew their master.

How do we know this, it's subtle but it's based on one word. "Immediately"

The word "*immediately*" at the end of verse 15 is important here...

It shows a sense of eagerness. It shows that they WANTED to work for the master. Because they KNEW their master. Because they LOVED their master.

So what do we learn from this?

Our perception **OF** God will ultimately dictate our response **TO** God.

So let me ask...

- What is your perception of God?
- What is God like to you?
- Is He Loving, Generous, Gracious, Compassionate, Patient, Kind?
OR...
- Is He Self absorbed, Uncompassionate, Merciless, Wrathful?

If He is the former, then how do you respond?

You see, I'm not here this morning to try to show or teach you how to be a good steward. (That's just behavior modification). Instead, I'm here to give you the right perspective of the Master.

Because your view of the Master is going to dictate the type of steward you are.

In other words,

Biblical Stewardship requires an accurate understanding of the Master's heart character.

Stewardship isn't ONLY about giving of your time, talent and treasure. It's about a life of grateful obedience to the Master.

So... Do you want to know if you're a good steward? Ask yourselves:

- What are you giving your life to?
- Where are you spending most of your time, talent, treasure on?
- Are you investing in the Kingdom FOR the sake of the Kingdom? Or are you hiding the talents you've been given?

The answer to those questions will show you, not only your view of the Master, but WHO your Master really is.

You see, family, Jesus truly is the giver and sustainer of life.

In fact, if you're a Christian here today, the Bible tells you that "You are not your own, you were bought with a price." 1 Corinthians 6.

That price came at the conclusion of the very discourse on the Mount of Olives that we just read, Jesus says, *"You know that the Passover takes place after two days and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified..." (Matt 26:2)*

The very next week after Jesus spoke this parable He would show the whole world the type of Master he was.

He would be the master who would:

- Feed his servants
- Pray for his servants
- Protect his servants
- Wash the feet of his servants
- Forgive his servants
- He would be the one who at that very moment would be living a life of perfect obedience in the place of his servants
- He would be the one who would lay his life down for His servants.
- He would be the type of master who would conquer death so that we would be able to live eternally with him
- ...So that all of us here today might be His servants for eternity

So now the question is... What do you do about that?

Jesus poured His life out for you... Will you live your life for Him?

Because the stark reality that NO ONE wants to hear is what Jesus prophesied in this very passage...

That ONE DAY the master will return. At a time that ONLY the Father knows and (as this chapter tells us) a day in which He will separate the Sheep from the Goats.

He'll come to settle accounts with his servants.

And he's going to have one of two responses for us.

Either...

"Well done, good and faithful servant! Share in your Master's joy"

Or...

"You evil, lazy servant!... Throw this good-for-nothing servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Which one will you be?

Are you living your life in preparation for His coming? Diligently working for the Master? Or are you hiding your talents?

You see, giving of your time, talent and treasure is just a small way it plays out... We're called to give our entire lives in grateful service to the master.

Do you believe that?

If so, what does that look like? It doesn't have to be as elaborate as doubling 500 lbs of gold.

- It can be as simple as serving here on Sunday mornings
 - BTW notice I didn't say "volunteer" -stewards aren't "volunteers" -stewards are servants, who serve the master. (Can we normalize getting rid of the "volunteer" language from the church?)
- Commit to serve in some way. -I know I said stewardship is about much more than your time, talent and treasure, but what you spend your time, talent and treasure shows who/what you're serving:
 - Commit your time by serving in Image Kids, on the hospitality team
 - Commit your talent by serving on the worship team or on the production team
 - Commit to being a part of a community group
 - Maybe you can't lead a group but commit to opening your home, your apartment to gather with God's people.
- Some of this requires sacrificing your time, but know this EVEN time is a gift that is borrowed.
- Commit your treasure by giving of your income to support the local church

Whatever you do, do something. Not for your benefit alone, but for the Master.

Hopefully you leave here today with a fresh understanding of stewardship. It's not about "doing" (out of obligation, duty or guilt), it's about "responding" out of gratitude and worship to the Master.

Get to know the Master!

Let's pray...