

A KINGDOM STORY FROM JESUS

MATTHEW 25:14-21, 24-28, 30 *“Again, [the kingdom of heaven] will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.*

¹⁹ *“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’*

²¹ *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’*

²⁴ *“Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’*

²⁶ *“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.*

²⁸ *“So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags... ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’*

1. How does Jesus’ parable reinforce what we have learned about stewardship in creation, God’s promise to Abraham, and God’s promise to Israel?
2. How does Jesus describe those who offered their master a good return on his investment? What is their ultimate reward?
3. How does Jesus describe the servant who made very little effort to offer his master a good return on his investment? How does Jesus describe the consequences of his inaction?
4. How would you describe the investment God has made in us? What would it mean to offer him a good return on his investment?



While we were building our home, some friends invited us to stay in their home while they were out of town. It was a gorgeous well appointed home, built by one of Austin’s premier homebuilders, with a wonderful view of the lake, every toy and gadget you might imagine, including an amazing wine cellar. They left the keys to the boat, the jet skies, and sports car on a table in the foyer. “They’re all yours,” they told us, “we’d be really disappointed if you didn’t enjoy them.”

We did. For a few days we enjoyed one of the most extravagant vacations we have ever experienced.

At the end of the week, we placed the keys back in their hands, left with some wonderful memories and as the story goes, we were “six pence and none the richer.”

In many ways that is a portrait of biblical stewardship. We richly enjoy gifts and graces that ultimately belong to another. While God gives us freely all things to enjoy, he expects a little more than an extended vacation and a few fond memories. God has not only given us what we have to meet our needs and bring us joy, he has also given us what we have so that we might glorify him and bless those around us.

Biblical stewardship is bound up in who God is and how he made us to live in relationship with him and each other.

THE CREATION MANDATE

GENESIS 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

GENESIS 2:8,15 Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden... The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

PSALM 24:1-2 The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; ²for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.

PSALM 8:3-4 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? ⁵You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. ⁶You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: ⁷all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, ⁸the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

1. The creation account clearly describes who we are, "a people created in God's image," and what we were created for, "to rule over the works of God's hands" as we "work and care for" the garden. We often describe the creation mandate this way: "God created us as a reflection of his heart and character, to live our lives in dynamic partnership with him and each other, stewarding the resources God has placed at our disposal for his glory, for our joy, and for the benefit of humanity as a whole."
 - b. How does understanding who we are, and what we were created for shape our understanding of stewardship?
 - c. What is the ultimate goal of stewardship?
4. How do we balance "ruling over the works of God's hands" and "working and caring for" creation?

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

GENESIS 12:1-2 The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ²I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

1. What are the promises God makes to Abraham?
2. What was the intended result of those promises?
3. One of the principles we glean from the Abrahamic Covenant is "We are blessed to be a blessing."
 - a. How would God bless Abraham?
 - b. How would God ultimately bless all the peoples of the earth through Abraham?
 - c. How have you and I been recipients of that blessing?
 - d. How does God intend to bless others through us?

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL

EXODUS 19:4-5 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

1. To be a "holy nation" means that Israel was set aside to serve God's purposes. To be a "kingdom of priests" meant that Israel was to mediate the grace God had given to them to other nations.
 - a. How had God blessed Israel as a nation up to this point in their story?
 - b. What kind of relationship did God desire to have with Israel?
 - c. Ideally what would it have meant for Israel to live out their calling as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation?"
 - d. Why was it important that they "obey God fully and keep his covenant?"
 - e. What implications does Israel's calling have on who we are and what we are called to do?
2. When God distributed the land of Canaan to the nation, he divided the land equally among the people, and made careful provision that the land would always return to its original recipients. At the very heart of God's gift was the reminder, "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers (Leviticus 25:23)."

Why was it important for Israel to remember that although God freely gave them the land (along with houses they did not build and vineyards they did not plant) to enjoy, that the land and everything in it ultimately belonged to God?