

# The Lens of Provision Affects Possibilities – Matthew 25:14-30

## Scripture Reading: Numbers 11:16-23

### Introduction

Last week we took a look at giving and how the way in which we, as individuals, view the resources we have affects how we give

I shared with you how Jesus spoke more about money and our relationship to it than he did about heaven and hell combined and that the only topic about which Jesus taught more often was the kingdom of God

And how that's because having a wrong relationship to possessions will steal our hearts away from God just as Jesus taught in **Matthew 6:21** – about how our hearts follow the thing we treasure

We saw the truth from Scripture that God is the source of everything we have and that we indeed aren't the owners of those things at all but actually we are stewards who are called upon to faithfully manage God's property

And we saw that the biggest difference between being an owner and a steward is that the steward will be called to give an account for how well he or she managed the owner's property

Then we looked at how there are only four things we can do with the things with which God has entrusted us

We can **spend** them on good or worthwhile things, we can **waste** them on bad or worthless things, we can set them aside, or **save** them, for a later date, or we can **invest** them so that they multiply

And in the case of giving that we have the opportunity to use our money as an investment that can multiply God's glory

**What's true of individuals is also true for the church which must also seek to use what they possess for God's glory**

This week we are going to take a look at the other side of the ledger to see what the Bible has to say to us as a church about handling God's money

And this is a vital subject for the church to consider because the church is also a steward and its members will be called to account for how they have managed God's resources

We will be seeking to discover how we can look through a biblical lens to see clearly what our **focus** should be as a church when it comes to spending, what should **control** our spending, and what should **limit** our spending

If you would, please open your Bibles and follow along as I read **Matthew 25:14-30**

*“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”*

## **I. Focus: Money or Mission**

This is a familiar passage for most of us and we have likely heard multiple messages based on this passage

But one aspect of the account may have slipped past us because it's kind of obvious and we often overlook and fail to consider things that are too obvious and I want us to notice this important detail –

### **The owner had an expectation for what his servants would do with his money while he was gone**

And his expectation was that the three servants would put his money to work and do the best they could with it and not just keep his money safe

I know that seems kind of basic but it's important because our text says that he apportioned the money “to each according to his ability” and surely any of them would have been able to keep the funds they were entrusted with safe

Simply hiding the money away and keeping it from loss wouldn't take any special skill and the master himself could have kept the talents secure and not entrusted his servants at all if that was his goal

But the point was to give the servants the opportunity to invest and increase the talents for the benefit of the master

And the fact that he distributed the talents according to the ability of the servants shows that **the master knew they might very well lose some or all of the funds entrusted to them**

It only seems logical then that his instructions to them would have been to do the best they could in his absence in making profitable deals with his money

### **And we see that the master wasn't unreasonable in his expectations**

He would have been satisfied if the last servant had simply put the talent into an interest-bearing account

He didn't demand a large return; he simply wanted each of them to do their best in carrying out his wishes

Clearly two of the servants understood what was expected of them and took steps to increase their master's money while one servant focused on the wrong thing and only sought to preserve what he had been entrusted with

### **His focus was on the money and not the mission and he completely missed the point of the exercise**

The church is also in danger of missing the point and allowing our focus to become misplaced if we're not careful

When people bring their offerings to the local church as Scripture says they should there is a responsibility placed upon the church to use that money in the way that God intends

The master in the Matthew account is obviously meant to be an analogue for God and we would be the servants who are tasked with carrying out his wishes

So our focus needs to be on what God would have us do with the offerings that are brought into the New Testament storehouse of the local church

We have spent a great deal of time focusing on our God-given mission of being witnesses for Jesus and making disciples of all people so we know what God expects from his church

And as we went through the book of Acts we saw some great examples as to how we might go about carrying out our mission

But really how we as a local church carry out our mission is largely left up to us just as how to handle the master's money was left to each servant's discretion

### **And the mission is making disciples and *not* storing up God's resources and keeping them safe**

Now, I recognize that God's people are meant to be good stewards and it behooves us to take care as we manage God's resources – I'm not suggesting that any church should indiscriminately throw God's money around

But every church also needs to ask whether they have shifted their focus off of the mission and onto the money

Whether they have forgotten God's instructions and are instead looking to preserve God's provision by making sure that they always have money in the bank

## **There are some dangers in that approach**

**One danger in focusing on money is that we can begin to put our faith in our bank account rather than in God**

### ***Manna***

Consider God's provision of manna to the Children of Israel during their time in the wilderness in **Exodus 16**

God caused the manna to fall from heaven each day and each day the Israelites were to gather only enough for that day

They weren't to hoard it or hold it over until the next day and those who didn't obey found it rotten and full of worms

God was teaching them to live life by faith in him and his daily provision and when they did as God said they found that everyone had precisely enough manna to meet their needs

### ***Security***

We too can fall into the trap of thinking that our security lies in whether or not we have sufficient funds set aside instead of relying on God to provide for our needs when they arise

### ***Profit***

And every church is in danger of beginning to look at themselves as if they were a for profit company

When that happens the members begin to feel a sense of assurance that all is well as long as the bottom line of the Treasurer's report shows we took in at least as much as we spent – and preferably more so that the savings account grows

But churches are supposed to be in the business of making disciples not making money

### ***Accountability***

When money is left over we should be asking what God provided for that went undone in fulfilling our mission

Just as every believer is a steward of the things that God has entrusted to his or her care, so the church, as a collection of individual believers, is going to give an account of how they managed God's resources

The master is away for the time being but he is coming back and we will be called to give an account

The question that every church needs to ask then is whether the mission suffered because the church was saving instead of strategically spending on God's mission

To put it another way, churches need to ask whether the Lord will be pleased when they hand back to him unused but safely preserved the provisions that he gave to them

Consider what we would think if one of our missionaries sent us a year-end report that showed how much bigger their bank account had grown instead of how they put the money we sent them into the work of the ministry

**Another danger in focusing on money and holding onto it is the longer we hang onto it the more we begin to see it as belonging to us and not to God**

It's just human nature that the longer we hold onto an asset the more reluctant we are to let it go

Dave Ramsey has a great illustration that he uses during his presentations where he calls two people from the audience onto the stage and he gives one of them ten \$10 bills

He then tells the person to immediately give one of those \$10 bills to the other person and it's really easy at that point for him to do so and they would be willing to do that as long as Dave was willing to hand them the money

But, if Dave were to allow them to keep the money overnight it would be harder for them to give the money away because they would see it as more of a loss – holding onto things makes them ours in our minds

Churches aren't immune from those feelings and the longer a church holds an asset the more reluctant they are to use it

**Our mission is to use the resources God provides to make disciples not to build bigger cash reserves**

We need to make sure that we keep a proper focus which means focusing on the mission and not the money

## **II. Control: Cost or Calling**

Once we accept that truth we come to the next issue which is what should control the church's spending

Typically, when a new program or ministry is proposed in a church the first question is, "**How much is it going to cost?**"

And sadly, far too many of God's plans are killed off before they can even get started because of that one question

And that question gets asked early in the process all because some well-meaning believer or group of believers are looking through the wrong lens

We look to passages like **Luke 14** where Jesus is teaching about the need to consider the cost of discipleship and we try to apply it to any and all programs that are proposed because in it we see sound thinking

Look with me at **Luke 14:28-30** –

*For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'*

Obviously, Jesus is showing that there is wisdom in considering the cost of a thing before beginning it in order to make sound decisions

Then we remember the old adage, "**A fool and his money are soon parted**" and we know that being a good steward of God's possessions involves a certain amount of careful consideration before spending them

I'm sure the successful servants in Matthew 25 were careful in their dealings because they took their task seriously

And I'm not saying that cost should never be a consideration because proper stewardship demands that we properly plan how best to use God's resources – it's only wise to seek to get the most bang for our buck

But I **am** saying that cost shouldn't be the first question asked and it shouldn't be the criterion that determines whether or not a program goes forward

**In other words, when looking to control our spending the primary consideration should not be the cost but the calling**

The first and most important question for the church to consider should be "**Is this what God wants?**"

Because if God is leading the church to undertake some endeavor the finances to see it through are guaranteed

God pays in full for what he orders

So when we allow our consideration of the cost alone to deter us from doing what God has prescribed, we are showing a lack of faith in his ability to provide as well as a lack of obedience to his will

### ***Paul's example***

As we went through the book of Acts we saw Paul go on several missionary journeys as he and his companions were obedient to their calling to take the gospel to the Gentiles

And we don't often think about it but those journeys had a financial cost attached to them

Transportation, food, lodging, and other costs needed to be provided for in order to get the various groups to where they needed to go and those journeys weren't short – they each lasted years

Yet we don't see Paul delaying his trips because he needed to raise funds or the church at Antioch saying they thought the expenditure was too great for the potential gain and besides, it would drain their checking account

No! They knew they had heard from the Lord and the calling was more important than the cost so they got moving and trusted God to meet their needs

Then in **Philippians 4:14-16** we see Paul commend the church at Philippi for repeatedly partnering with him with their financial gifts as God worked through them to meet Paul's needs

Even as we see in **2Corinthians 8:2** that they gave in spite of the fact that they themselves were in poverty

Still, Paul assured them that because of their faithfulness, God would be faithful to meet their needs God rewards faithfulness making the cost a secondary consideration

## ***Feeding of the 5,000***

Turn with me to **Mark 6:35-44** where we will find the account of the feeding of the 5,000

*And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "**Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?**" And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.*

In **verse 37** we see Jesus give his disciples the command to feed the people and their immediate reaction was to consider the cost which made the task impossible in their estimation because they didn't have that kind of money

After all a denarius was equivalent to a day's pay so they were looking at a substantial cost for food sufficient to feed the crowd of 5,000 men and probably a significant number of women and children

If the disciples had been left to themselves and their natural line of thinking Jesus' desire to feed the people would have gone unfulfilled

But Jesus showed them that he was sufficient to provide for what he commands and that he was able to do so in an over-abundant manner

God pays for what he orders so our first and controlling concern should be whether a thing is of God and not its cost

## ***Determining God's will***

Unfortunately, it's in the process of determining whether a thing is God's will where many churches find difficulty

God desires to reveal his will to his children and to make it known to us in a clear way and there are some specific things we can do to make sure we properly hear from God

**First, we need to determine that we will be obedient to his will when he reveals it** and not wait to see if it matches up with what we want to do

This is one of the toughest things to do because all of us find it difficult to **surrender our will to God's will** and we're all prone to hearing what we want to hear – after all, if we're excited or reluctant about a thing we want to think God is too

Still, none of us wants to be guilty of opposing God or of going our own way so we have to be sure that we truly desire to know God's will and to be willing to align ourselves to it

**Then we need to be obeying what we already know to be God's will**

God has made clear what his mission is for the church and by focusing on getting that done we will see more clearly how God wants us to do it and the church that is busy with the mission can expect to hear from God

**Then we need to be walking with God** which means we need to be striving to live our lives close to him through regularly and consistently being in communication and communion with him through prayer and spending time in his Word

**Being faithful to doing all of those things will help us to recognize God's will and we will be better able to face the question of cost without it being as intimidating as it might otherwise be and without allowing our fear of funding control our calling**

### **III. Limit: Our Reserves or God's Resources**

Because we see there really is no **limit** to the funding for God's work when we look at it through a biblical lens

We aren't limited by what we have, what I've called our **reserves**, but by God's **resources**

And **God's resources are limitless**

We saw this in the passage that Rosie read earlier from **Numbers 11** when the Children of Israel were grumbling about the manna that God was providing and weeping over the lack of variety in their diet and God told Moses that he would give them meat to eat for a whole month

Naturally, Moses focused on the wrong thing as he calculated just how much meat would be needed just as the disciples would later do when told to feed the crowd

Moses knew there were 600,000 mouths to feed and you can picture him scratching calculations in the dirt

"Let's see...even if we figure a meager 4 ounces of meat per person per day that would mean 150,000 pounds of meat per day times 30 days equals 4-1/2 million pounds of meat for the month"...and he had his doubts

He argued for his position before God asking where the flocks and herds would come from to provide the meat and since they were presently in the desert it seems Moses got a little sarcastic and asked whether he should serve the people fish

Then in **Numbers 11:23** God asked Moses a simple question that showed him he was thinking too small –

"Is the Lord's hand shortened?" which means "do you really think I am unable to do what I just said I would do?"

When I worked in manufacturing we had guys who we said had "short arms and deep pockets" meaning that they never seemed to be able to reach their change when it came time to buy coffee at the coffee machine but they were always happy to have someone buy them a cup even as they vowed that "next time" the coffee would be on them

But God doesn't have short arms and he is always able to do what he says he will do because his resources are unlimited

Why don't you join me in **Numbers 11** and we'll see how God provided the Israelites with meat to eat

Look with me at **verse 31** –

*Then a wind from the Lord sprang up, and it brought quail from the sea and let them fall beside the camp about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, around the camp, and about two cubits above the ground.*

God didn't provide a little meat; he provided quail that surrounded the camp in all directions for the distance of a day's journey

And God made it easy for the Israelites because the quail couldn't do more than flutter to a height of about 3 feet above the ground so they could just be picked up or snatched out of the air

So they were able to gather and prepare enough quail to last for the next 30 days

The fact that the quail served as a kind of judgment does nothing to diminish God's ability to provide

**God is the God of abundance and he desires to provide his people with the means to do what he wants them to do**

God wants us to look past what we see as financial limitations and to see him and what he desires and then to step out in faith trusting that God will provide everything needed to complete his will

The question we have to answer is whether we believe God when he says that he will "open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need" as we saw last week in **Malachi 3:10**

Then we need to demonstrate our belief by relying more on God's resources than our balance sheet because God will only bless those who are busy doing his will

## Conclusion

Looking back at the account in **Matthew 25** the last servant was obviously afraid of what he thought would happen if he failed in his task of using his master's money

He likely knew even better than his master did that he really wasn't a skilled deal-maker and that he might lose his master's money if he tried to increase it through wheeling and dealing

So he engaged in what he probably thought was a fool-proof plan to stay out of trouble and just protected the talent until he could hand it back to his master

His fear kept him from doing the one thing his master required of him and reaped him a severe tongue lashing, loss of reward, and banishment

I have to believe he would have been better off if he had tried and failed than to have done what he did and not try at all

## Accountability

What about us?

We know what our Master requires of us and we know he has the ability to provide us with everything we need to get the job done

We also know that the Lord's return is imminent and when he returns we will be called to give an accounting

The books will be thrown open and each church will be asked about what they have done with what they've been given

Which do you think would be most pleasing to the Lord; the church whose bank account was bulging with cash or the church whose bank account was empty because all of the money had been used to minister to the making of disciples?

## Qualification

I hope you would know without my having to say it but I'm not suggesting we go on a spending spree and empty our accounts – that would be foolish and poor stewardship of God's resources

However, I am challenging all of us to cultivate a biblical worldview concerning our finances

A worldview that focuses first and foremost on what God wants and on his limitless ability to fund his programs

Just as we have to learn to trust God in the area of our personal finances and give back to him proportionally according to how he first blesses us we need to learn to trust him as a church body with the funds that come in

We need to have a proper understanding of God's economy and believe his promises to us that our needs will be abundantly met as long as we put our trust in him into action

Because when we do, we will see the promise of **2Corinthians 9:8-11** fulfilled in us –

*And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written,*

*"He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."*

*He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.*

Not only will we have all that we need to do the work God has given us to do and see our ministry become even more fruitful but our faithfulness will result in additional glory to God

**God's provision is limitless so let's not be guilty of seeing limited possibilities**

Let's pray