

Week 7 – The Talents – Matthew 25:14-30

Scripture Reading: Luke 19:11-27

Introduction

“When the cat’s away the mice will play”

We all instantly recognize that short saying and we understand that it has less to do with actual cats and mice than it does to the behavior of people when they are left unsupervised [boss.jpg]

We know all too well that workers who are left unsupervised will tend to engage in activities that are more entertaining than their work or just relax and be lazy

But it might surprise you to discover that the expression isn’t limited to English speaking locales but that many languages have an expression that describes the phenomenon in slightly different ways

One source I found says the **Latin** expression translates to” “When the cat sleeps; the mouse leaves his hole rejoicing”

And that the **Russian** expression is: “Without a cat; there is freedom for mice”

In **German** the parable is: “When the cat is out of the house; the mice dance upon the table”

And in **Spanish** they say: “When the cat is not here; the mice have a party”

Different cultures and languages express the idiom a little differently but they all communicate the same universal truth

That people don’t always do what they’re supposed to do when the boss is away

But this isn’t a new phenomenon as we will see in our passage this morning where we find **the parable of the talents**

Our passage today is **Matthew 25:14-30** (page 830 of the visitor’s Bibles) and I suggest you turn there is you have not already done so and follow along as I read the passage in its entirety

In the passage we see Jesus, while teaching them about the kingdom of heaven at the Second Coming, tell his disciples:

“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.’

As we begin we will consider the **analysis** of the parable

Then we will look at the **application** of the parable

And then we will consider how we can **assess** the nature and extent of our individual talents

As we seek to analyze the parable we will look at the details of the parable and then talk about a difficulty that we find within the parable

I. The Analysis of the Parable

A. The details

The setup of the parable found in **verses 14-15** is that an obviously wealthy man who was about to undertake a journey, distributed a portion of his wealth to each of three of his servants

As will become obvious as we proceed is the fact that his expectation was that each man would be responsible for managing the assets that he entrusted to him during his absence

Talent definition

Now a “talent” in the New Testament sense actually referred to a weight so its value depended a great deal on what was being weighed

Obviously, a talent of gold would be worth considerably more than a talent of silver or copper

Then when you take into account that a talent weighed different amounts at different times; determining the value of a talent can be quite a challenge

But most sources say that a talent in monetary terms which we are considering today was equal to 6,000 denarii and a denarius was considered to be the amount a soldier or day laborer earned for a day’s work

So, we are fairly safe in determining that a talent would be equal to just over 19 years’ wages for the common man if we allow for a 6-day work week

So we see that the man was entrusting a significant amount of money to each servant

Talent distribution

And we see that one man was given 5 talents, another 2 talents, and the last man was given 1 talent

We are also told that the talents were distributed according to each servant’s previously demonstrated ability to handle money and engage in business affairs

So the servants were treated fairly and none of the servants was given more than he could reasonably be expected to handle

Today, this distribution would likely be looked upon with suspicion because many people have adopted a Marxist view of distribution “to each according to his needs” but we see here that the biblical view is “to each according to his ability”

And the amount each servant was given was truly a blessing to them because it suited their personal capabilities best

To burden a 1-talent man with a 5-talent responsibility would be cruel and drive him to certain failure

I once had a young man working for me when I was in charge of a tool design department

He was a novice to the metal stamping world and he had a job that was largely clerical and supportive of the tool designers

But he wanted more – and he kept clamoring and pleading for the opportunity to design a stamping die on his own and he wouldn’t be convinced that the job was beyond him at this stage of his career

So, I gave him a job to complete and he was thrilled at first –

But it almost gave him a nervous breakdown because he didn’t even know what he didn’t know and the details and demands of the job were too much for him

I ultimately took the job over from him and he gratefully went back to his normal duties which he was better suited for and actually excelled at

I couldn’t see any other way to teach him this lesson but we can be grateful that God knows us each intimately and he knows what we can handle because he has given us our abilities and our resources

And I want you to notice that no one came away from the master empty-handed

The master gave each servant precisely what was appropriate to provide the service required of him

None of them was overburdened or short-changed and each was truly given a large amount to manage

After all, even the least among them was put in charge of over 19 years' worth of earnings

Apparently, the master didn't tell the servants just how long he would be gone – we find out later in **verse 19** that he was gone "a long time" but the implication is that none of the servants knew when to expect him to return

Talent use

And this is significant because we see two of the servants, the one who was given 5 talents and the one who was given 2 talents, rushed out to engage in business ventures with the talents he had been given

They recognized the weight of the task they had been given and they set about fulfilling it with expedience not knowing how long they had

And they stuck with it over the long haul which shows the first two servants went about their work **promptly** and with **perseverance** and they engaged in **productive pursuits**

And both of those servants doubled the value of their talents by the time the master returned

But the third servant, who had received 1 talent, went and buried his talent in the ground for safekeeping

The very clear implication in the parable is that each servant knew what was expected of him

After all, the job of a servant is to work for his master's benefit so although we don't see an explicit command to go out and use the money to earn more money we can be assured that each slave knew what was expected of him

So we have two servants who got to work quickly engaging in profitable pursuits of some kind or other and who persisted over the long haul and one who did nothing but make the feeblest effort to preserve the master's money

The reckoning

Then in **verses 19-20** we see that the master returned after a long time and sat down to settle accounts with his servants

The first thing we need to notice is that each man was judged individually and not according to what the group as a whole had accomplished

After all earning 7 talents on an 8-talent investment means the master earned a return of 87.5% which would make most investors very happy today

But each man was evaluated according to his individual faithfulness

As Spurgeon put it, "Remember that in the day of judgment your account must be personal; God will not ask what your church did – he will ask you what you did yourself."

The excitement and eagerness to report to the master is evident in the case of the first two servants because each of them had double the amount they had been given to return to their master

You can just picture them approaching their master with big grins on their faces as they anticipated his pleasure

And the master was pleased

Notice what he says to each of the first two servants –

He tells them, "Well done", he commends them both for being a "*good and faithful*" servant, he gave each of them a promotion commensurate with their efforts and he invites each of them to share in his happiness

Notice the reward for both was exactly the same even though one had earned 5 talents and one had only earned 2

They weren't commended for the amount they earned for the master but for their faithfulness in fulfilling their task

And the first two servants proved to be both "good" and "faithful"

And that brings us to the third servant's report

Notice in **verse 24** that he begins by blaming his perception of his master's character for his lack of increase

He says, "*Master, I knew you to be a hard man reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed*"

In plain terms he told his master that he knew him to be a harsh, greedy man who used the labors of other people to enrich himself

And the implication was that he believed he wouldn't be rewarded if he succeeded in earning a return and that he would surely be punished if he failed and actually lost some or all of the talent he had been entrusted with

So, being afraid of either expending unrewarded energy or of being punished if he failed or both, the servant only sought to avoid any negative consequence and he simply dug up the talent and returned it to his master

The master's response stands in stark contrast to the commendation the first two servants received

He calls him a "*wicked and slothful*" servant and he tells him that if he truly believed that he was a hard taskmaster who would judge him harshly he should have at the very least put his money in the bank where it could gain interest

And the master took the talent away from the lazy servant and gave it to the servant with the 10 talents

When we treat what we have been given as nothing and do nothing with it; it will ultimately be taken away from us

But the one who is faithful with what he has been given will be given even more

Assessment basis

The fact that both men doubled their initial investment seems to indicate that success was guaranteed as long as they proved to be faithful in putting forth the effort to use what they had been given

Therefore, I believe we err if we make too much out of the fact that they doubled the amount they were entrusted with because the point of the parable is that they made the effort to use what they had been given

And when we consider the master's rebuke of the third servant we see that the master would have been satisfied with simply receiving the interest he might have earned from having his money deposited in a bank account

After all, when we consider that this parable is about the kingdom of heaven and the master would then equate to Jesus and the servants represent his followers then we know that he is the one who gives the growth anyway and it's our faithfulness that he is after

B. The difficulty

Now we come to the last verse of the parable and there we find a difficulty that we need to overcome regarding how to best interpret this parable

Look with me at **verse 30** again – "*And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*"

There are many who believe that the third servant was cast into hell and I can see how they might come to that conclusion

After all, we just looked at the parable of the fishing net where the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth was the fiery furnace of hell

But I don't believe hell is what is in view here – let me explain why

First, all three of these men are called "servants" and nowhere is an unbeliever called a servant of God and it seems unlikely that God will judge unbelievers for anything but their unbelief

That is to say, the Bible doesn't express anywhere that people will be condemned for a lack of good works but only because of their rejection of the Son

Then we have to remember that we are dealing with a parable that uses symbolic language to make its point and the meaning of the metaphors and descriptions can change between parables in order to make that point

We saw this very plainly in the parables of the soils and the weeds – how Jesus used the same images to mean completely different things

So when he speaks here of "outer darkness" and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" those terms can mean something different in different parables

Egalitarian misconception

Part of the problem with interpreting this passage is that we find it difficult, if not impossible, to accept the idea of darkness and sadness and remorse in heaven

We have the idea that all of us will be rewarded equally and reign equally alongside Jesus in his kingdom

But Scripture tells us that while all believers will receive entrance into heaven on the same basis according to God's grace alone accepted through faith alone there will be a difference in the rewards and responsibilities handed out once we get there

And those rewards and responsibilities will be handed out on the basis of what we have done during our lives here

Turn back a few pages with me to **Matthew 16:27** where we see Jesus teach this truth –

*For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, **and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.***

The apostle Paul teaches the same truth in **1Corinthians 3:10-15** – let's look at that passage together

*According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. **If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.***

Clearly Paul is speaking here of believers because all are admitted into heaven but he says there will be reward or loss for each individual believer based on what we have done in this life

And in our passage this morning we see that one of the rewards that will be given or denied is responsibility in the kingdom

Those who are faithful with what they are given here will be rewarded with more responsibility when the Lord's kingdom comes in perfection

So I believe that the third servant, as a believer, will be a citizen of heaven but he will not be given a place of honor and responsibility there – he will be a subject but not an official

And he will feel this loss and regret his lack of faithfulness in some way as he will be separated from the same level of joy that his faithful fellow servants were invited to enter into

I want to show you just one more thing concerning this quickly before we move on and that is the use of the term "outer darkness" elsewhere

It is only found three times in Scripture and Jesus uses it all three times in the book of Matthew

The first time is in **Matthew 8:12** where it is "*sons of the kingdom*" who will be thrown into outer darkness due to a lack of faith

And again in Matthew 22:13 in the parable of the wedding feast where a man accepted the invitation to salvation and was admitted into the banquet

He is even referred to by God as being a "friend" but he didn't have the proper wedding attire so he was cast out into the outer darkness

And the third use of the term is in our parable this morning

It seems clear that all of these uses are referring to believers who will miss out not on heaven itself but on the ultimate glories that can be experienced there

They will be in the kingdom but they will miss out on the reign they could have had if only they had been faithful and clearly this will be the source of profound regret

Finally, I chose our Scripture reading from Luke 19 because it contains a very similar parable about a master entrusting his servants and then settling accounts with them when he returned from his trip

But I also selected it because it contains a very important part about some people not wanting him to rule over them and we see in that passage that those people were treated very differently than the servants who failed

And I believe that shows us that in these parables the servants are meant to represent believers even though some believers disappoint the master

II. The Application of the Parable

So how should we apply the truths of the parable?

First, we see that –

A. We must faithfully serve because diligence is rewarded and dereliction is punished

The Lord is coming again and this parable tells us that there will be a day of reckoning when what we have done in this life will be judged and we will receive either reward or loss

In **Luke 8:18** Jesus told his disciples to pay heed to the parables because of this coming judgment when those who are found faithful will gain even more and those who are not will be stripped of what they have

We seldom think of laziness as a sin

But when we consider that the third servant wasn't dishonest – he gave his master's property back to him and didn't try to keep any of it for himself

He was simply lazy – he didn't think about what might happen, he didn't toil for his master, he didn't even try to earn the bare minimum for his master by depositing the talent with the bankers to earn interest

He might well have been afraid but his master judged him with a righteous judgment and called him lazy and for the sin of sloth he was deemed to be wicked

We tend to put a great deal of emphasis on the sins we don't commit and think we're doing well for God

After all, we don't dance, drink, smoke or chew and we don't go with girls that do so we must be alright

Right?

But this parable teaches us that the sin of **omission** is every bit as great as the sin of **commission**

The Lord's brother, James, writes in James 4:17 - *whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.*

In the parable of the weeds we saw that unbelievers – those who do evil – would be cast into the fiery furnace but here we see believers who fail in their God-given responsibilities suffer loss and regret in the kingdom

Both are serious offenses in God's eyes and both end in regret

Second, we need to recognize that –

B. Everything comes from God including our abilities and the opportunities to use them

The parable also shows us that everything we have comes from God and that includes our abilities and the opportunities to use those abilities

Whereas the parable is about money and how the servants did or did not put it to work, I believe it's fair for us to view "talents" as whatever we have received from the Lord

And like the servants in the parable who were given the talents in order to use them to benefit their master, we are given "talents" to use for the Lord

They aren't really gifts even though we use that terminology any more than the master in the parable gave gifts of money to his servants

Those were in fact temporary loans that they could use to make a profit for the master and by doing so please their master and earn a reward

Rush Limbaugh often says that he has “talent on loan from God” and it drives a lot of people crazy because they misunderstand the humility that goes along with that statement

They assume that he is claiming God-like qualities for himself but I’ve heard Rush say exactly why he says that line Admittedly, he does it in part to tweak his critics but Rush also sincerely recognizes that he is not a self-made man and that his talents and abilities are given to him by God to use during his life here to bring glory to God

And by using that line he is acknowledging the fact that he has a responsibility to use his gifts to honor God

And that’s the way we should look at our talents whatever form they might take

We should always be asking how can we use what God has entrusted to us for his glory

And we need to recognize that **God does not give us something to do without also giving us the ability to do it**

God doesn’t set us up to fail

He didn’t ask any of the servants to serve beyond their ability but gave them all they needed to do the job

They just had to be faithful to do it and it’s exactly the same with us

Lastly, we need to accept that –

C. Our diligence now determines our future position

When our Master returns, He will come to reward us according to our faithfulness, and we will be rewarded with different levels of authority in His kingdom

I once knew a foreman at Caterpillar where I served my Tool & Die apprenticeship and he was asked to cover another foreman’s lines in addition to his own while that foreman was off on medical leave

He protested that he couldn’t handle that additional work, it was simply too much to expect

So they found another foreman who would take on the extra work

And when the time came a few weeks later to promote someone to the position of General Foreman the first foreman was rather chastened to be told he himself had said he couldn’t handle the job so he wasn’t even considered for it

Our faithfulness today has eternal implications and if we want to be fully used of God in eternity we need to prove ourselves useful now

III. How We Can Assess our Talents

And that brings us to the issue of assessing what God has entrusted us with or how can we assess our talents so that we might use them properly and be found faithful

A. Not everyone has the same number or nature of talents

First, we need to accept that not everyone has the same talents either in their number or their nature

They are assigned by God according to each person's ability and according to God's will for that servant and that all we are given comes with the responsibility to use it for God

And since everything comes with a corresponding responsibility for which we will be judged only a fool would lust after another person's talents if they aren't also gifted with the ability to use them properly

Just as David couldn't go up against Goliath while wearing Saul's armor – you will struggle and likely fail as long as you are trying to be something that God has not designed you to be

So we need to understand what talents we have been given and there are ways to do that

B. There are ways to determine what talents we have been given

The first step is to pray for God to open your mind and heart to recognize what you have been given

Then you should read God's Word and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you through it

But also talk to other Christians and ask them what they see in you

I can tell you from experience it was other Christians who first saw that God had equipped me for leadership in the church and it was others who first saw God had gifted me to teach and then preach his Word

Then one of the best ways to discover your gifts is to experiment in ministry

Try different things out – get involved in something and give it a fair assessment to see if it fits

By doing so you will soon find what you enjoy and what you don't and it should become obvious where you fit

But you can trust that God has gifted you and that means he has a plan for your life and your service during this life and he wants you to be obedient to it so that he can bless you even more abundantly

Conclusion

The main point of this parable is clear; our master has gone away to a far country and his return of which will bring the perfecting of his kingdom is at this time delayed

His servants have been looking for his return for the past 2,000 years and we have no idea how much longer it might be, so we must concentrate on being faithful servants while we wait and watch

And we know that our master has given us work to do while he is away and everything we need to be successful in it

We also know that every person will be called to give an accounting of what they did personally with what they were given and that reward will be given or removed based on our faithfulness

So if we want to hear those words "good and faithful servant" applied to us, and if we want to receive future reward and enter into the Lord's joy the key is being faithful now

Let's pray