

## **“Well Done, Good and Faithful Servant”**

We’ve been unpacking Jesus’ teaching known as “The Parable of the Talents” from Matthew 25:14-30. Jesus is giving us—at least in principle—the ways in which we’re to live our lives as we await his certain return. Under the heading, “The Return of the Master” we looked briefly at the praise and promise given to those who, by grace, remain faithful to the Master. Last time we began our look at the sad story of the servant who “buried his talent in the ground.” This servant illustrates someone who makes excuses; who misrepresents and even falsely accuses the Master to try to justify his self-centeredness and even laziness. This servant gives us a startling picture of what happens in the lives of those who are agnostic toward Jesus; those who want to, presumably, “play it safe” by saying things like, “Who can really know if the Bible is true?” It’s very important to see that this parable teaches us that there’s no middle ground. We’re either living our lives ultimately for God and for His kingdom or we’re living as kings of our own mini kingdoms that we establish, which is just to say that we’re living for ourselves. I want to conclude this series of articles with some practical ways in which we can think about Jesus’ teaching in this parable:

—Be encouraged! God is at work in the lives of Christians for our good. He has “predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son.” (Romans 8:29-30) God guides and strengthens us by the teaching of scripture and by the Holy Spirit, all for His glory (1 Peter 4:10-11). A Christian’s life will produce genuine fruit (Luke 6:45). We can find joy in all of our obedience to God (John 15:10-11). Although it’s true that neither our motivations or our obedience are perfect, we should be able to see that we’re increasingly motivated—not by being seen and praised by others for what we do—but motivated out of love and thankfulness for Jesus Christ.

—Having said that Christians should be encouraged we’ll also, if we’re being honest, recognize ways in which we can, by grace, seek to improve our lives to the glory of God. We’re prone to laziness in our obedience and our service. There can be days, weeks and even longer where we’re merely going through the motions. Although we may serve—in the home, in our neighborhood, in our vocation, and in our church—our service is often joyless and given out of a sense of obligation. While it’s true that we waste opportunities and waste time, we must pray that God will help us to be motivated to seek to give our first and our best at every opportunity.

—Be reminded that our service to others must follow a biblical structure. Although there are caveats (e.g., 2 Thess. 3:10) we have a priority to give of ourselves within the family first and then secondly, the local church (e.g., Lev. 25:25; Matthew 25:40; 1 Corinthians 12:7; Galatians 6:10; 1 Timothy 5:3-5; Titus 2:4; James 2:15-17) It’s often true that service within the family and the church are mutually beneficial (e.g., 1 Timothy 5:16). “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than

an unbeliever.” (1 Timothy 5:8) And yet, our service and giving of ourselves to others, as God gives us opportunities, will extend to non-believing neighbors and friends.

—This last point expands on the previous point. Far too many who’ve said that they love Jesus Christ often see no need to be fully committed to the local church. Although making a biblical defense of ecclesiology (the doctrine of the Church) is outside the scope of this article, suffice it to say that Jesus taught us, “I lay down my life for the sheep.” (John 10:15) “By this we know love that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” (1 John 3:16) We need to ask ourselves this question: “Is my connection to Jesus Christ and His Church one of commitment or convenience?” It’s important that Christians are able to truthfully say that we love both Christ and His Church. We must love what Christ loves therefore, we will want to use our time, talents and treasures in such a way that, by grace, the local church may flourish.

As we conclude this series of articles on “The Parable of the Talents,” I pray that we have a renewed excitement for the day when Christians hear our Savior say, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master.”

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