

Living Every Day in Light of Eternity

Some of you reading this article may remember a song entitled “5 O’clock World” from a 1960’s group called “The Vogues.” Note the futility in the following lyrics: “Up every morning just to keep a job—I gotta fight my way through the hustling mob—Sounds of the city pounding in my brain—while another day goes down the drain.” These lyrics held the view that our daily job is a meaningless grind. Sadly, this song was held up as an anthem for many who believed that all of life held no real meaning—that every day was just another wasted effort and nothing mattered except a self-absorbed focus on me and what I wanted after 5 o’clock.

Today, over 50 years removed from the release of that hit song, many are still asking questions like, “How can we possibly make sense of life, given the pain and tragedy that’s all around us?” Christians stand in a unique place and have a unique message of genuine hope that speaks to the hopelessness that’s being expressed all around us in words and actions. There are many instances of senselessness in the world and yet, there’s only one true answer for the sin problem that we all share in. The answer is the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to bring salvation and he’s coming again as Judge of all the earth (2 Tim. 4:1). Because this is true, every day and every moment in life matters for eternity.

Today I’ll begin a new series of articles from Matthew’s gospel on the parable of the talents. This parable gives us a genuine look at how we’re supposed to be living our lives in light of the certain return of Jesus Christ. Christians have been given a responsibility to be used of God as instruments of his grace in the lives of those around us. This responsibility, like obedience to all of God’s truth, will bring us joy but it will also bring challenges. I want to begin to look at this parable under my first heading:

—The Responsibility of the Servants

This section of Matthew’s gospel which includes chapters 24 and 25 is known as “The Olivet Discourse” and is the last public teaching that Jesus gives before the events that will ultimately lead up to the cross and Jesus’ death and subsequent resurrection. This parable is not the first time that Jesus has taught on the theme of what constitutes genuine salvation and how our salvation leads us to obedience to God and service to others (Mt. 7:24-27; 13:1-23). Christians believe that we’re not relying on our own obedience as the foundation of our saving relationship with God. We’re resting in the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. But, that’s not to say that our obedience doesn’t matter. It does matter! As we look at this parable, allow me to note at the outset that the ways in which the servants invest their talents is not what makes them right with God. Jesus is teaching that a true servant will manifest himself or herself to be a true servant in the life that he or she lives because of a desire to honor and obey the Master.

As we begin our look at Matthew 25:14-18 we’re told that the Master is going on a journey and he entrusts his “talents” to his servants. Biblical scholars teach us that a talent was actually a measure of weight and when used to describe money could be describing gold, silver or copper. The point that we need to see is simply that “talents” represent the time, gifts and

opportunities given by God whereby we serve God and others (Galatians 6:10). 19th century pastor and author J.C. Ryle writes, “Anything whereby we may glorify God is a talent. Our gifts, our influence, our money, our knowledge, our health, our strength, our time, our senses, our reason, our intellect, our memory, our affections, our privileges as members of Christ’s Church, our advantages as possessors of the Bible—all are talents.”

In our parable, each of three servants received different amounts of talents; one five, one two and the other one, “each according to his ability.” The point of this is simply recognizing that we’re not all given the same gifts or opportunities for loving service to others but we’re all responsible for the opportunities that we’ve been given. We’re all called to wisely use our time, gifts and treasures for the glory of God. Are you focusing your life almost exclusively on yourself or do you look for opportunities to bless others? Our lives are not to be lived as if each day were “another day that goes down the drain.”

Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois.