

Matthew 25:14-30  
November 19, 2023

## Faithful Servant

“Everyone who has, will be given more. And everyone who doesn’t have, even what he has will be taken from him,” Jesus thus speaks after having told the Parable of the Talents.

In this parable a benefactor dispenses fortunes to three different people; one received five, another two, and the third one talent (a talent is a large sum of money, perhaps between six and ten thousand denarius, which is given as the general amount for a day’s wage. This would mean it would equal to twenty or thirty years of work).

The five talent person and the two talent person take risks and manage to double their money, and are commended for it. The one talent man, on the other hand, buries his money to guarantee he will not lose it and is rather harshly condemned for it, and sent in to the outer darkness with the weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The story conjures other sayings:

“Nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

“To give anything less than one’s very best is to sacrifice the gift.”

Rather, there is a contrast to the other short, biting statements we do *find upon the lips of Jesus*, such as, “the last shall be first and the first last,” and, “anyone

who seeks his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake shall find it,” and, “It is easier for a camel to get through the eye of needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.” The saying in this parable, if we are thinking about it and not just passively accepting it because it is scripture and therefore must be edifying in some way, is surprising.

I am sure everyone knows about the Robin Hood story. With his band of “merry men” in the Sherwood Forest, Robin Hood led a life of banditry, mostly targeting the evil Prince John, taking from the rich, and giving to the poor.

Admittedly, there is a difference between the two cases; the benefactor in the parable shelling out talents, and Robin Hood and his band of thieves. There is a clear case of “apples and oranges” in play. Yet the sentiment that seems consistent with the general idea of the legend runs counter to the statement of Jesus. and can be stated in a similar form, “From the one who has much, some will be taken, and given to the one who has little.”

There is a striking distinction in content, between the statement of Jesus from the parable, and the implications of the Robin Hood legend. The contrast is enhanced when one considers the longstanding religious tradition of charitable giving, and the warnings against the pursuit of wealth for its own sake, and about the dangers of selfishness and greed.

When we are talking about money, little sense can be made out of this parable. But when we are talking about life, it makes all the sense in the world.

In the context of Matthew's gospel, sandwiched between the Parable of the Ten Virgins and the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, both about being faithful in service, it is clear this parable is about *what kind of people* we endeavor to become, which is another way of saying, what kind of persons God desires us to become.

Human beings have been born into a world of relationships played out in multiple settings;

Home, family  
Neighborhood, residential community  
Work, vocational community  
Church, faith community  
School, educational community  
State or Country, political community  
World, larger human community

I characterize these facets of life as, "community," and repeat this word like a jackhammer, because it represents relationships, which is the realm of life at the heart of the gospel message. To one degree or another, relationships may be healthy or unhealthy, operating smoothly, or strained, sometimes to the breaking point.

Whenever we read a parable that uses the financial aspect of life as an example, or an illustration to make

a point, keep these settings in mind, that is, keep in mind that we are being given an exhortation, or an instruction, or an encouragement that applies to all of life's relationships within all the communities in which we live.

It would be a mistake to conclude, for instance, that the Parable of the Talents means we should invest our money in the stock market, or some other means of increasing it, as if the world of wealth and finance is the only sphere of relationship that we know.

Just as for us, a wage or a salary gives a monetary value, not only to the product we produce when we are at work, or to the service we render, but to the energy that we spend, the physical effort, the resourcefulness and ingenuity, the intellectual and mental substance, the essence of who we are that we give to the tasks associated with work, a talent in this story is meant to convey a very high value on all that we have been given, to be and to do in every facet of life.

The parable reminds us that the gift we have been given is precious. Whenever, in our lives, or in the life of the world, things become strained, or even broken, and even if the relationships involved are not the closest, most personal, life can be burdensome, experienced as a heavy load. One gets the impression that the one-talent man experienced life in this way. The only thing the text says is that he considered his benefactor "a hard man." No matter the reason, he buried it.

In this sense, one can see that to live fully and in gratitude and generosity and love is like investing money in the market, in brings an eternal return.

We may notice, and think of this parable as presenting us with both an assurance, and a warning. The warning side of this story is that when we bury the gift, sometimes because we are frustrated and maybe exhausted and maybe injured even, but none-the-less we give away something precious, of the essence of our lives.

We must all make decisions for ourselves about where to put our limited energies. But that is different than burial, a kind of refusal to accept the gift of life, a refusal that has some serious and difficult side affects. Please do not allow yourself to wallow in the warning side of this story when life is heavy and burdensome. But neither dismiss the warning entirely.

The assurance side of his parable is that what the five-talent-person and the two-talent-person are commended for is the acceptance of life with gratitude and the gladness of heart at least enough to be, and to give, out of whatever they have, in whatever way the opportunities of life make possible.

With this encouragement in mind, we can rest in God's peace, as we await the final blessing:

“Well done, faithful servant . . . come and share your master's happiness.”

Local Church Autonomy  
Voluntary Connectionalism

Contrasts:

The individual and the community  
Freedom versus destiny  
Independence and interdependence

The historical source of patriarchy, the collegiality of the early Christian movement versus the hierarchy of Roman life, the adoption of the patriarchal model, in the 4th century and the modern rejection of it.

A matter of biblical interpretation, for there is no proof text for this ideal.

Philippians 2:5-11- Lordship of Christ

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:  
6 Who, being in very nature God,  
    did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;  
7 rather, he made himself nothing  
    by taking the very nature of a servant,  
    being made in human likeness.  
8 And being found in appearance as a man,  
    he humbled himself  
    by becoming obedient to death—  
    even death on a cross!  
9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
    and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
11 and every tongue - that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Acts 1:8 The Great Commission

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will *be my witnesses* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

John 20:21

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

John 17:21

21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

2 Corinthians 9 - The Gift for the Jerusalem Church

Ephesians 4:1-6

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

2 With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love;

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

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