

Good and Faithful or Wicked and Lazy?

Pr 28 yr A Matthew 25:14-30 November 15, 2020

This is a million dollar bill. And no before you ask it is not real but rather a novelty note because we don't have banknotes in this denomination in Canada. The reason I'm showing it to you is that when I talk about the parable from our gospel lesson to teenagers I use 15 of these novelty banknotes to tell the story.

Because in Greek and many English translations, Jesus tells of a master giving talents to his servants, which is why this parable is often called the parable of the talents. And when we hear talent we think of things like singing, drawing, gardening, sewing, or some other skill that we might have. And if we think of the parable strictly in those terms we miss much of what Jesus is saying.

Because a talent for the people of Jesus' time is a certain weight of precious metal worth about 9 years of good wages. So one servant got 45 years of wages, the second 18 years of wages, and the third 9 years of wages but that still doesn't give us anything easy to imagine. But if we start talking about 5 million dollars, two million dollars and one million dollars this becomes a much different parable. Because even the servant who gets the least still gets an incredible amount. Which helps us begin to hear what Jesus is teaching.

Jesus tells of a master who goes away and calls his servants and gives them some of his wealth. One gets five million dollars, one gets two million, and the third one million. Why the different amounts? Well Jesus explains that each servant gets what they can handle so everyone is able to manage what is given to them. Which is important because it all gets dropped into their laps to do with as they see fit. A fortune for them to use. But there is a catch even though it isn't explicitly stated. The wealth still belongs to the master and at some point he is going to come back.

The first two servants use the money. We're not told exactly what they do but they increase the wealth entrusted to them. The third servant though decides to bury the amount to keep it safe. And the master returns and calls for an accounting. We can almost picture him lining the servants up and saying "So what did you do with my riches?"

The first servant, who received five steps forward and says that he earned five more. And of course the master is thrilled. He says "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in a few things I will put you in charge of many

things. Enter into the joy of your master.” And notice those words. Good and faithful. The promise of more to manage because of a job well done. And last but certainly not least the joy of the master.

The second servant, who received two steps forward and says he earned two more. And the master is as thrilled as he was with the first servant because he says the exact same words “well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in a few things I would put you in charge of many things. Enter in to the joy of your master.” Good and faithful. The promise of more to manage because of a job well done. And last but certainly not least the joy of the master.

And this is where we see that this parable is about more than money management. Because the master’s response and joy to the first and second servant is the same even through they are given different amounts of wealth and have different levels of success increasing it. The master seems to be concerned about something other than the wealth which becomes obvious when the last servant steps forward.

The third servant comes before the master and explains that he is afraid of the master and he didn’t want to lose any of the money so he hid it away and is now going to return exactly what the master entrusted to him. And the master is furious. He calls the servant wicked and lazy because he says if you were that afraid of me then you should have entrusted the money to someone else so at least it would have grown a little during my absence. And he banishes the third servant, which isn’t really a surprise but then the master does something unexpected. He orders the wealth entrusted to the third servant be given to the first servant.

And now it is obvious that while this parable mentions money and finance that isn’t the point. Because within the parable the master reclaims none of the money that he gave to the servants before he left but rather leaves it with him and actually hints he will soon give them more. And the master’s concern isn’t about how much they earned but rather that they did something with the gifts entrusted to them. Because this parable is about being trustworthy with the things God has placed in our hands.

And that is where this parable really strikes home. Because it stands as a reminder that God has placed great wealth in our hands and God expects us to use those things not selfishly, not to stop God from being mad at us, but faithfully. Taking what we have been given to enrich and expand the gospel itself.

And yes, right now I am talking about money because that is part of what Jesus is talks about. For we are expected to use our money faithfully. We are to give, be generous, and bring hope and healing with the wealth we have under our control. That may involve giving to the church or charity in order for good to be done, it may involve us using the money directly to buy or pay something for someone else, but it always involves us helping others, giving to others, selflessly.

But this parable is about more than simply sharing our material wealth. It is also about using the forgiveness, the mercy, the grace, and the love we have been given faithfully. So that we forgive as we have been forgiven, bless others and we have been blessed, and love boldly and freely, and deeply as God loves us. This parable is a call for us to use what we have been given, what comes into our life and affect and change not merely our own lives but the lives of those around us and the world itself.

And that is the real question of this parable. Because while few of us may have millions of dollars placed in our hands we have all received riches from God. Within our lives, your life and my life, there are blessings and opportunities and time itself. And the question each of us need to ask ourselves, the question the parable of Jesus asks is ‘how are you using those things?’

For in our parable we are shown two examples. Those who have and use it for the glory of God, so that what God gives becomes more prevalent and plentiful in the world. And those who hide what they have been given out of fear and worry.

So are you good and faithful with what you have been given? Do you seek each day to increase the kingdom of heaven, the presence of God with what you have in your grasp? Or are your wicked and lazy, thinking only of yourself and refusing to risk, to go beyond your own fears with what God has entrusted to your care?

Because make no mistake about it, Jesus calls us to faithfully answer God by using our wealth, our gifts, our talents, in a way which brings joy to heaven, furthers the hope and peace of the gospel, and allows us to share even more in what God is doing in our world.