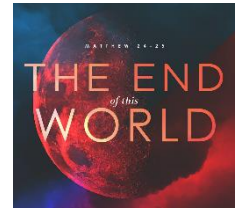


Our Masters Happiness
Matthew 25:14-30 on March 22, 2020



Please read Matthew 25:14-30 before going further in this transcript.

We are now in the third Sunday of our 4-week series on “The End of This World.” When we started out, none of us had any idea how COVID-19 was going to impact our world. But now WE know, what God knew all along: That our false sources of security would be shaken; that our faith would be called into action. Each of us is responding to this virus in our own way, choosing between “fight mode” or “flight mode,” or somewhere in-between. How about you; how are you doing? Is there still some fight left in you? Or, are you in “flight mode;” have you retreated behind your bunkers, until the “Coronavirus Craziiness” is over? In today’s passage, Jesus gives some clear instructions on what His servants should be doing in the Last Days. Specifically, what we should be doing with our time/talents/treasure while we wait for His return. Today’s passage warns us not to just hunker down and hide in a hole until Jesus’ returns. Instead, Jesus urges us to finish strong in godly living. Today’s passage has an immediate application for godly living in the days of COVID-19. Please open your Bible to Matthew 25:14.

Until He returns, Jesus has entrusted us to steward His resources. This is the one and only main point in today’s message. Matthew 25:14 begins,¹ “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them.” Those first 5 words, “Again, it will be like,” point us back to verse 1, “the kingdom of Heaven will be like.” In other words, v. 14 borrows from v. 1, referring to Jesus’ return and what the Kingdom of Heaven will be like. Matthew 25:14-30 is yet another Kingdom Parable; it’s designed to teach us how to live UNTIL Jesus returns. Matthew 25:14 says that the master, “...entrusted his wealth to them.” When there is trust between a servant and his/her master, it’s usually the sign of a healthy relationship. In fact, later on in this parable, we’ll discover that this trust offers each servant the opportunity for mutual happiness, with the master. Now, since the master “entrusted HIS wealth to them,” this means that it’s not THEIR wealth. The servants in this parable, didn’t actually own the gold. They were entrusted with their master’s gold. Matthew 25:15 goes on, “To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.” So, they weren’t being PAID in gold, as wages for work they had already completed. They were given the gold, ENTRUSTED with it, in order to finance the work, that they were about to do. In other words, their master was giving them resources, which he expected them to spend and to put into use while he was gone.

All 3 of these servants were given the master’s resources for a purpose. This becomes obvious in the very next verse. Matthew 25:16 says, “The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more.” The 1st servant was eager to get to work. He got busy doing what his master expected him to do. This good/faithful servant didn’t waste any time. He took his responsibility seriously and seized the opportunity.² He “...went at once and put his money to work...” From the context, apparently the 2nd servant did the same.

Until He returns, Jesus has entrusted us to steward His resources because He is our Master. We have a generous master. He wants us to succeed so that He can return and greet us with these words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” He does

¹ By this point in Jesus’ Olivet Discourse, we begin to realize that: even though He Himself didn’t know exactly when He’d return, He did seem to suspect that it wasn’t going to be any time soon. We saw this last Sunday when Jesus told the “The Parable of the 10 Virgins.” Matthew 25:5 says, “The bridegroom was a long time in coming...” So long, in fact, that all 10 of them fell asleep. We see this again in today’s “Parable of the Bags of Gold,” in Matthew 25:19, “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.” Brother or Sister in Christ, it may be a while before Jesus returns. We’re living in the days of “UNTIL.”

² D.A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Rev. Ed., #9, Matthew & Mark*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2010, p. 580.

NOT give his servants these assignments just for His OWN happiness, but also so that they might share in mutual happiness with him. In other words, He is setting us up for success. That's clear right from the very beginning. Jesus clarified this back in Matthew 25:15, "To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability..." The master in this parable didn't put too heavy a burden, on any of his servants. They each had ability and they were each given resources in keeping with their particular ability.

So, if all 3 of these servants had BOTH resources and abilities, then why did the 3rd servant have such a hard time with this? After all, he had a valuable bag of gold (worth approximately \$200,000!) and he had the ability to steward that gold. So what was the problem? In Matthew 25:26, the master calls him "wicked and lazy." Those character flaws probably didn't help. In Matthew 25:30 the master describes him as "worthless." But what made him worthless? The master gave him such an amazing opportunity and entrusted him with such an important responsibility. Why did he respond SO differently than the other servants?

The first few times that I read through this parable, I thought it was because he was afraid. After all, that's the excuse that the servant gives in verses 24-25, "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'" So, fear COULD have been the reason why the 3rd servant responded so differently than the first two. Fear makes us humans do some pretty crazy stuff. In fact, a lot of this past week's hoarding and selfishness has been driven by fear. But, upon further reflection, I'm not so sure that fear is what really impacted his response.

Take a look at verses 26-27, "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?

Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'" It's important to note that the master didn't necessarily agree with the servant's assessment of him. He just repeats the servant's accusation in his own question.³ If this servant really was afraid of his master because he was so harsh and hard to work for, then wouldn't he have at least put the money in the bank and gotten interest? In other words, the master is calling his bluff. So it seems unlikely that this servant was responding out of fear. If he was truly afraid of the master, then he would have put the money in the bank to gain interest. So apparently, claiming that he was afraid, was a smoke screen to hide his real reason. There must be some other reason why he responded SO differently than the other 2 servants...

What was the real reason that he hid the gold in the ground? Certainly, he understood the gold's value; that's why he buried it. This was a common way of securing valuables at that time in history.⁴ For some reason, he seemed to think that it would be good enough to simply keep it secure.⁵ The idea of putting the gold to work either didn't occur to him, or he simply wasn't compelled to do the work. He just didn't care about the opportunity and the responsibility that the master had given him. This is the crescendo that Jesus has been building toward as He tells this parable. He is about to make His main point. Watch for it; this is what He wants His listeners to understand.

The crescendo is in Matthew 25:29, "For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them." **Whoever has what?** The preceding verses would suggest, whoever has

³ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2011, p. 1742, footnote on Luke 19:22.

⁴ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, 2015, p. 1985, footnote on Matthew 25:18.

⁵ In fact, he may have even thought that he was being wise by not taking chances with someone else's gold. It may have simply felt safer not to take any risks. Perhaps he even thought that the master would be pleased with his choice.

the gold? But ALL three servants had gold, so that doesn't make sense. **Whoever has will be given more of what?** Again, maybe given more of the gold? But the 2nd servant didn't get any more gold, even though he was also called "good/faithful," just like the 1st servant. So, what is Jesus driving at?

The broader context for the entire Gospel of Mathew is the Kingdom of Heaven. In fact, the Kingdom of Heaven is what we have been learning about for our entire past year in Matthew. That's what Jesus is driving at in v. 29: The Kingdom of Heaven.^{6 7} In other words, Matthew 25:29 is not concerned about the bags of gold, it's concerned about the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus is telling us this parable, to help us better understand what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. Here is what the Kingdom of Heaven will be like: Whoever values the Kingdom of Heaven, will be given more of the Kingdom. But whoever does not value the Kingdom of Heaven, even the opportunity that they once had, will be taken away from them.

You see, Jesus wants to give us more of the Kingdom. And we should desire more of His Kingdom. But don't think of this as greediness on our part. The Kingdom of heaven is not about amassing lots and lots of bags of gold. It's about finding the one thing that really matters in this entire universe, and then placing all of our energy and affection on that one thing. All throughout Mathew's Gospel, Jesus has been urging His followers to seek His kingdom 1st.

Now, it's true that in verse 28, the 1st servant was rewarded with another bag of gold. But he was also rewarded with SO MUCH MORE THAN THAT! In fact, both he and the 2nd servant, were commended as good and faithful servants, and they were both given 2 particular rewards from the Master:⁸

1 Being entrusted with even more things. 2 Sharing their Master's happiness forever.

Notice how verses 21 and 23 are identical: "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'" In the parable, the master says the exact same thing to the first 2 servants, "Well done... Come and share your master's happiness." But the 3rd servant didn't seem at all concerned with sharing the Master's happiness. He wasn't focused on making the master proud. He wasn't interested in hearing "well done, good and faithful servant!" But the master is excited to share His happiness with his servants. He is pleased to return and hear the report from the 1st 2 servants, of how they stewarded his resources.

Jesus has entrusted us to steward His resources because He wants us to share His happiness forever. This is the rest of this morning's 1 main point. My sincere hope and prayer as a pastor, is that everyone watching today is aiming for the "well done, good and faithful servant."⁹ We're not looking for Jesus to return so that He can give us a big paycheck. After He comes back, Jesus isn't going to say, "hey thanks, what do I owe you?"¹⁰ We are His servants; we are waiting for our Master's return. If Jesus is not yet the Master of your life, this parable won't make any sense to you. In fact, the Christian life won't make any sense to you. This is why our church talks about "becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus together." The Christian life is about becoming fully devoted to our Lord and Master. He alone is worthy of our devotion. If we

⁶ In fact, Matthew 25:29 is not the first time that Jesus said something like this. Jesus said pretty much the same thing back in Matthew 13:12, "Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them." In Matthew 13:12, the context was knowledge about the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. Likewise, here in Matthew 25:29, the context is the Kingdom of Heaven.

⁷ In fact, "Verse 30 makes it clear that Jesus' real point is a spiritual one since the fate of the faithless [servant] is eternal punishment." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, 2015, p. 1986, footnote on Matthew 25:28-30.

⁸ "The first servant displays the results of his work and is praised and rewarded with greater responsibility and with rejoicing in the company of his master." Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, p. 373). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁹ Last Sunday, we learned that "Jesus will return expecting faithful and wise behavior." Right behavior flows out of right relationship.

¹⁰ Consider Jesus' teaching in Luke 17:7-10, "...we have only done our duty."

decide to be devoted to other things. If we determine to steward what God has blessed us with, by burying it in the ground. Then v. 30 tells us that we will end up being thrown out, as a “worthless servant.” We will be separated from the presence of God forever, and go to the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is a reference to hell.

Until He returns, Jesus has entrusted us to steward His resources. Stewardship means that we have both the opportunity and the responsibility to invest God’s resources. The Master’s resources aren’t doing anyone, any good, buried in the ground. But perhaps as you read this, you are wondering: “Pastor Jerry, I know that we have the responsibility to steward our lives for God’s purposes. But how can you say we have the opportunity? After all, I’m not even supposed to get within 6 feet of anyone. They’re closing down schools and restaurants and all kinds of other gathering spaces. How am I supposed to minister to people, when everyone is practicing “social distancing” and “sheltering in place”!? Some of you are already figuring out how to do this. I’ve been hearing about it all week. I’ve been hearing all kinds of wonderful and inspiring reports, about people serving one another. I’m so proud of our church this week. I’ve heard about so many phone calls, emails, etc. asking: “how can I help?” Does someone need child care? Is there anything that I can do to help the elderly folks in our congregation? So many of you, beat my sermon to the punch!

Personally, it is taking me a while, to come to grips with the many disappointments that COVID-19 has caused. In some ways, I’m still wrestling with all of the inconveniences and cancellations. I was feeling pretty low a couple of days this past week. But, I’m learning to see the incredible opportunities right in front of us. As tragic as this COVID-19 Pandemic is, and may continue to be for quite some time, it has also become an incredible catalyst for community-mindedness and spiritual outreach.

Here are 4 Ways to serve during COVID-19:

1 – PRAY: health care workers, law enforcement, grocery stores, GP’s, etc.

2 – LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR: Check on them and see how they are doing. Ask if they need anything. (They might need toilet paper!)

3 – WATCH FOR GOSPEL OPENINGS: COVID-19 has reminded all of us of just how fragile we are, how much we truly need God. This is an incredible opportunity for Christ-followers to give witness about what it means to have a firm foundation in Christ.

4 – CALL SOMEONE: Don’t just text or email. Let them hear a human voice. I wish that I had time to show you a video clip from back in the 1980’s. Some of you can still remember the old commercials, “Reach out and touch someone.”¹¹ My favorite one is where an older married couple is sitting at their kitchen table and the wife tells her husband that their son “Joey called today.” Right away the husband responds, “what’s wrong? Is he ok? Are his wife and kids ok?” The wife responds that everyone is fine. But then, she begins to cry. Joey said he called... “just cause I love you mom.” It’s a real tear jerker! Brother or Sister in Christ, let’s “Reach out and touch someone” this week. Even in the days of major technological advances, a simple phone call continues to be a great way to serve each other. No matter how many or how few bags of gold God has entrusted to us, every one of us has something to share. Your bag of gold might be your time, your words, your prayers, or your acts of service. Let’s get creative and let’s get motivated to practice godly living in spite of this Novel Coronavirus. Right in the very face of COVID-19, let’s find ways to bring God glory and to love our neighbors. **Let’s steward the abilities and resources that our Master has entrusted to us!**

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on March 22, 2020 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vz4O6y3LEXw>