

While It Is Day
Matthew 25:14-30
Pastor John Miller

I want to read the whole parable, and then we will come back and unpack it, section by section.

Matthew 25:14-30 says, "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey."

"Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money."

"After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'"

"He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'"

"Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.'"

"Therefore, take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

When we began this series, I shared with you that there were three, basic benefits to studying prophecy or eschatology, as theologians call it. It is the eschatological study of future events. The benefits are, number one, that it cleanses us. 1 John 3:3 says, "Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." The hope of the coming again of Jesus Christ is a purifying hope. When you lose the hope of the coming of Christ, you lose the motivation to

live in purity.

The second benefit is that it comforts us. In John 14:1-3, Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house...”—or “heaven”—“...are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” It’s a comfort to know that Jesus is in heaven preparing it for me. He is preparing me for the place and the place for me. And I know that He will come and take me to heaven.

The third benefit of prophecy, which introduces us to our topic today, is that it compels us. In John 9:4, when Jesus healed the blind man, He said, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.” Jesus was talking about the need to do what God had called Him to do and to use the opportunities that God the Father had given Him to advance the kingdom and glorify His Father in heaven.

In our text today, in the parable of the talents, Jesus is teaching us the importance of being ready for His return. The point of this parable is that we keep working until the Lord returns. All these parables stress that we need to be ready, we need to be faithful and we need to be watching for His return. How do we do that? By being busy.

Watching does not imply idleness. You don’t just put on a white robe and sit on a mountaintop waiting for the rapture. You don’t go into a monastery and hide away. You roll up your sleeves and get busy serving others. We get busy doing the Lord’s work. Why? Because “The night is coming when no one can work.” We must work while it is day. So until the Lord comes back, it is daytime, so to speak, and we need to be faithful.

In a parallel account of this parable called the parable of the pounds, in Luke 19:13, Jesus said, “Occupy till I come.” It means to be engaged in business and ministry and service. Use your time, talents and treasure to advance the kingdom of God. So we must be faithfully working until Jesus Christ comes again.

Since I grew up in church, I’ve heard many hymns all my life. There is a beautiful hymn we used to sing that goes:

“We’ll work till Jesus comes....

And we’ll be gathered home.”

What a glorious thing. We’re not home right now. Don’t get too comfortable; this world is not our home.

So we need to be looking “for a city...whose builder and maker is God.” We should be laboring for God in light of His coming.

Whenever you interpret a parable, one of the most important things is its context. In most parables, there is something that precipitated it or caused it to be spoken, which indicates why it was given. The context of the parable of the talents is found in Matthew 24:3. "The disciples came to Him privately, saying 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'" The first question—"When will these things be?"—about the destruction of Jerusalem, is dealt with in Luke 21 and Mark 13. It is passed over in Matthew 24 and 25.

Jesus comes to the last two questions: "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" The "age" or period is "aiónios" in the Greek. The "coming" in this verse is a reference to the Second Coming of Christ; not the rapture. The Second Coming will be preceded by what the Old Testament calls the time of "Jacob's trouble" or by the tribulation, a seven-and-a-half-year period of trouble on the earth. It will be a time when God's wrath will be poured out on the Christ-rejecting world. God's primary purpose during that time will be to prepare Israel for the coming of their Messiah. Many Jewish people will come to faith in Messiah during that time. So this parable was given in the context of the Olivet Discourse and in the context of the signs of His Second Coming.

Everything we read about in this parable of the talents, in its first and primary interpretation, has to do with those living in the tribulation just before the Second Coming. It has a clear and powerful second application to us, the church today, to be working until Jesus comes and raptures us. But it's primarily for those who will be alive during the time of the tribulation. Those people missed the rapture, they're living during the tribulation and they will turn in faith to Jesus Christ and will use their opportunities to expand the kingdom while they are waiting for Christ to return.

The parable of the talents involves three servants and their lord or master. Two servants are saved and faithful, and one is a wicked, evil servant. I don't believe the wicked, evil servant represents a saved individual or a true child of God. This servant is cast into "outer darkness" where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth." The lord of the servants represents Jesus Christ. He is taking a long journey, but he comes back.

There are five sections to this parable. The first section is the responsibility they were given, verses 14-15. "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability..."—that's important—"...and immediately he went on a journey."

So basically what we have here is a wealthy landowner, who calls three servants in and tells them he is going away for a long time. There is a clear indication in this parable that between the first coming of Christ and the Second Coming of Christ there will be a long period of time. We are in this long period of time, and we're still waiting for Christ to return. During this time, Jesus says we are to be busy doing what He has entrusted us to do. So the master gave to his servants the talents; he delivered or entrusted to his servants his goods.

To one servant the master gave five talents, to the second servant he gave two talents and to the third servant he gave one talent. Don't misunderstand the English word "talent" here. He's not talking about natural abilities, like playing the piano, tap dancing, doing ballet or singing a song. Jesus is talking about a weight of money.

A talent is a weight of money. In that time, they didn't have paper money; they had coins. We don't know how much a talent would be worth, so it's hard to estimate. But it would either be in silver or gold coins. The value would be at least in the thousands of dollars. Some estimate that a talent would be \$1,000 in silver. Most Bible students agree that it would be a substantial amount of money. If a talent were \$1,000 today, the master would have given \$5,000, \$2,000 and \$1,000. Some say a talent is \$1 million. That's quite a big jump. If you calculate it in gold, it might be \$5 million, \$2 million and \$1 million entrusted to these servants.

The master gave talents, these weights of money, to each of these servants "according to his own ability, and immediately he went on a journey." The lesson here is that opportunities are given to us that match our abilities. God gives us opportunities that match our abilities. Your abilities are given to you by God. Whether they are so called "natural abilities" or they are supernatural gifts of the Spirit, they come from God.

But the focus should not so much be on our abilities but rather on our opportunities. The whole key to this parable is fidelity or faithfulness to the opportunities that God gives us. Every one of us has been given an opportunity. You have an opportunity to serve the Lord: to pray, to give, to read your Bible, to go to church, to tell others about Jesus Christ, to support missionaries, to be a missionary, to support the work of God. We are all given opportunities.

What are you doing with your opportunities? Are you multiplying them? Or are you squandering them? Are you taking advantage of the abilities God has given you and seizing the opportunities to do what God has asked you to do?

I believe that whatever God calls us to do God enables us to do. God gives us the ability to do His will. He never tells us to do something without giving us the ability to do it. When a husband is told to love his wife "as Christ loved the church," he can do it.

"Yeah, but that was written before my wife was born. It wouldn't be in the Bible if it was written today."

"No."

How about, "Wives, submit to your husbands"?

"Have you seen my husband? Are you sure that applies to me?"

"Yes."

As a pastor these many years, I'm many times painfully aware of my inadequacies and my

inabilities. I have to remind myself that God knows what He's doing; God gave me this opportunity, so God will give me the ability. Many times I pray, "God, give me the wisdom, strength and ability, because I'm not sufficient in myself." Paul said that about ministry: "Who is sufficient for these things?" Our sufficiency is of God.

So we have to spend time on our knees. Whatever it is that God is calling you to do, whatever talent He is calling you to do—maybe it's just being a faithful wife or husband, raising children in the way of the Lord, leading worship, teaching a Bible study, being an usher or greeter or working in children's ministry—you need to be faithful.

The second section, in verses 16-18, is the responses that they had. How did the servants respond? "Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents." So he invested his master's money. Notice that it was his master's money and not his money. So whatever ministry or opportunity or talents or gifts that God has given you, they belong to God. They're not yours, and you want to use them for Him. So the servant multiplied the talents from five to ten talents. There was a 100-fold return; he doubled the money. Verse 17, "And likewise he who had received two gained two more also." This servant also doubled the investment. Now here's the contrast: "But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his master's money." He dug a hole and stuck it in the dirt. So some got busy serving their master faithfully and multiplied their gifts and opportunities, but one was unfaithful and buried the talent in the ground.

So how do you respond to the opportunities that God has given you? You need to be careful; if God has given you a lot of opportunities, don't be proud. You need to be careful; if God has given you fewer opportunities or abilities, don't be jealous. If God has only given you one talent, and you're looking at the person who has five talents, don't be discouraged.

"Why can't I preach at the crusade? Why can't I be a missionary? Why can't I write the book? Why can't I do this [or that]?"

Don't be discouraged; God knows your abilities, He's given you opportunities to match them, and He'll give you the strength to fulfill what He's called you to do. Step out by faith and trust God to seize those opportunities.

The third section is the reckoning they faced, verse 19. "After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them." Note this says, "After a long time...." There is a long interval between His first coming and His Second Coming. So don't get discouraged, don't give up, don't say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." The longer He tarries, the closer He is to coming. Every day He tarries means another day to serve Him, to win others to Christ, to do what He has called us to do. We must "work...while it is day." It is also another day closer when we will see Jesus face to face.

"After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them." So in this

one verse, we know that there will be a delay between the comings of Christ, but that He will come and He will bring a day of reckoning.

Verse 20, “So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents;...’”—there is almost a sense of joy and excitement in his voice—“...‘look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’” Because he was faithful, increased the talents and took the opportunities, he’s excited to see his master. He’s excited to give to him what God has done through his life.

Then “His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’” These are some of the greatest words in the Scriptures. “Well done” could be translated “excellent.” “‘You were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.’” That means he’s going into the kingdom age, the millennium, the 1,000-year reign of Christ and will co-reign with Christ. “‘Enter into the joy of your lord.’” There is joy in serving the Lord, but there will be joy in the kingdom age, when Christ returns and we, the church, will come back with Him. Even the tribulation saints will go into the kingdom age and be with Christ and reign with Him. What a glorious truth that is!

Verse 22, “He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things...’”—here’s the principle—“...I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.” Notice that the servant who had the two talents and made two more talents gets the very same commendation as the servant who went from five talents to 10 talents.

Notice the words “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Jesus didn’t say he was smart or good looking or charismatic. Jesus said he was “faithful.” If you are faithful to the opportunities, with the abilities God has given you, you will hear the same commendation from God.

When Billy Graham got to heaven, he heard, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

You say, “Yeah, yeah; he was the great evangelist, Billy Graham!”

If God called you to be a prayer warrior, you get on your knees and pray for your pastor. Your pastor needs all the prayer he can get. Pray for the church. Pray for missionaries. If you did it faithfully, when you get to heaven, you’ll hear the very same commendation that Billy Graham heard: “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your lord.”

God calls you to raise your children in the ways of the Lord. You might be raising the next Billy Graham. You don’t know. When you get to heaven, you’re going to hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your lord. You have been faithful over a few things; I will make you ruler over many things.”

I believe that our lives should be motivated by one passion: when that day comes and we look on His face, that we will hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” The longer I

serve the Lord in ministry, that's all I want to hear. All I want to hear Jesus say to me is, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your lord." It's not about what we can do; it's about what God can do through us. It's about being faithful to the opportunities that God has given to us.

Now we come to the one-talent servant. Verse 24, "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man.'" From the word "hard," we get our word "sclerosis." The servant said his master was really a hard, cruel, harsh guy. "...reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground." A common way to store your money in those days was to dig a hole and hide it in the ground. "'Look, there you have what is yours.'" So the servant gave his master back the one talent. "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.'"

So now we have the reckoning these servants faced. The master or lord comes back, the first two servants multiplied from five to ten and from two to four talents. They took the opportunity and multiplied what they were given. Now the focus is on the third servant. He was called a "wicked and lazy servant." I don't believe this servant is saved. My interpretation of this is that he is not a true Christian; he's not a child of God. He may be professing, but he's not possessing that relationship with God.

In the church, not everyone is saved. And not all preachers are saved; there are people preaching the Bible who aren't born again, so they don't have the truth of God. There will be wheat growing up with the tares. We really won't know who they are until the Lord separates them. So this last servant is really not a genuine Christian.

This servant said to his master, "Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed." Really? Is he talking about the same Lord I know? The same Lord Jesus Christ who is gracious, merciful, kind and compassionate? I don't think so. I think this servant is making excuses. I think he's wicked and slothful. He doesn't really describe his master. He didn't really know the Lord; he's not a true believer.

Notice that he operated in fear: "And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours." We need to live by faith. It takes faith to venture out and step into the opportunities that God has given us. You might be afraid, but God wants you to trust Him. How sad this is.

It's interesting that he's actually blaming God for his wicked slothfulness. Think about this: "It's your fault; you're hard, cruel and mean!" The servant is actually blaming the master for his own inactivity and productivity loss. That's pretty sad.

It reminds me of Adam in the Garden of Eden. God asked Adam, "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Adam said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." His focus was not on the woman but on the woman "you gave to be with me." Adam was saying, "It's Your fault, God! I was doing just fine with the animals. I took a nap, woke up and was married, then everything went south!" And husbands have been blaming their wives and God ever since.

This servant is wicked, because he doesn't know his master. All my years of serving Jesus Christ I've found that He is so kind, so patient, so merciful, so compassionate and so gracious. And I am so unworthy and so undeserving.

You say, "Well, what about the master's own words in verse 26?" He said, "You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed." The master's not saying that he's cruel and steals from other people. He's saying that if that is what his servant really believed, then the servant should at least have put the money in the bank so that the master could have gained some interest when he returned. So the master was actually saying, "You're not consistent with what you're saying; you're just making excuses. What you say doesn't make sense. If you believed I was hard, then you should have done something to gain me some interest."

The fourth section is the reward of the righteous and the retribution of the wicked. The reward of the righteous in in verses 28-29. "Therefore, take the talent from him." So the one-talent servant lost even what he had. This is "use it or lose it." Either you use the opportunities or you lose the opportunities. You either respond to the light or reject the light, and you go into the darkness. He continues, "...and give it to him who has ten talents." Now here's the rationale: "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance."

If you use what God has given you, then God will give you more. If you show faithfulness to the opportunity God gives you, then God will give you more opportunities. A lot of people are sitting around waiting for big opportunities and doors to open, but it never happens. Everyone who God called in the Bible was working when God called them. They weren't just sitting in a robe up on the mountain waiting. They had their sleeves rolled up and were busy working. Then God called them.

I meet people who say, "Pastor, I want to do this [or that]."

"That's great. What are you doing now?"

"Nothing. I'm just waiting."

"Well, we could use a lot of helpers around the church."

"Oh, no; I'm called to bigger things."

"I don't know if that will ever happen. You start with the little things."

What opportunity has God given you? My philosophy is that if you love the Lord, if you love Jesus with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and you get an opportunity to do something for Him in service, you're on it. You don't question it. You just say, "I'm there. I'm all in." You ask, "What can I do to serve the Lord?"

This wicked servant manifested, by his inactivity and his lack of productivity, that he didn't know the Lord, didn't love the Lord and wasn't committed to the Lord. The others showed their love for Jesus by their multiplied activity and their service.

There is one way to look at this parable: If you really believe Jesus is coming again, then get busy. If you really believe that the Lord is going to return, then what are you doing in light of that? How is it motivating your life? There were great spiritual rewards given to the faithful servants.

The fifth and last section is the retribution given, verses 29-30. "But from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." It's pretty clear that this is a graphic description that Jesus gives of hell: "weeping and gnashing of teeth." "Cast out into outer darkness." Hell is eternal, separation from God, is darkness and a place of torment and "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

There are so many today who want to diminish the doctrine of hell. We live in a politically-correct culture that has infiltrated the church, so we're not getting our cues from the Scriptures but from the culture.

"Oh, I don't believe in hell anymore. That's an old, archaic concept."

No; it's from the lips of Jesus Christ Himself. Hell is not made for the believers; it's made for Satan and his angels. But if you reject His provision of salvation through Jesus Christ, Who died on the Cross in your place and rose from the dead, then you have only one, inevitable destiny, where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" and "outer darkness." Then you will be separated from God for all eternity in hell.

There are four words I want to share with you in closing. The first word is return. Verse 19 says that the master returned; he came back. The parable teaches us that over a long period of time, Christ is coming back. I don't care how long He tarries; I believe that Christ is coming back. Do you believe that? I believe that Jesus Christ is coming soon, and we need to be ready.

The second word is reckoning, verse 19. He "came and settled..."—or "reckoned"—"...accounts with them." There is an important doctrine in the Bible that one day we will actually stand before Christ and give an account of our lives to Him. It's called the Bema or "reward seat." We won't stand before Christ for our sins, but all Christians will give Him an account of what we did with our opportunities. The sad thing is that there will be some people who have a saved soul but a wasted life. They wasted opportunities. They didn't serve the Lord. They

didn't live for God. They were going to heaven, and that's all they wanted. Then they lived for their life on earth. That's a tragic thing.

You can waste your life; you can just live your life. Or you can invest your life. Jesus said, "Whoever seeks to save his life, will lose it, and whoever loses his life [for My sake], will preserve it."

This parable again stirred my heart to remind me how important it is to consecrate everything to Jesus.

"Take my silver and my gold;

Not a mite would I withhold.

Take my hands...take my lips...

Take my feet and let them be

Swift and beautiful for Thee."

"Use me for your glory, Lord, while it is day. The night is coming when I can no longer work." There is a day of reckoning for both the believer and the unbeliever, who will have to give an account to God for what we did with our time, our treasure and our talents.

The third word is rewards. In verse 29, the one who had five talents and multiplied them to ten was rewarded with another talent. God is actually going to reward your service to Him. It's a reward based on your faithfulness, not the amount of your productivity. You don't have to do as much as other people; you just have to do what God has called you to do. If whatever God has called you to do, you do it faithfully, you will be rewarded, and you'll hear those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

The fourth word is retribution, verse 30, at the end of the parable. He is casting the unprofitable servant into "outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

We sing the song:

"If you're saved and you know it

Then your life will surely show it."

That's what the parable says.

Are you saved? Do you believe that Jesus is coming back? Then how are you living your life?

Let's pray.