

November 19, 2023  
Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 25:14-30 (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11)

## SERVANTS OF THE MASTER.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

As we near the end of the Church Year, our appointed Scripture texts focus on the return of Jesus and His End Times judgment. This focus can lead to several different attitudes among the hearers of the text. You and I long for Christ's return and the resurrection of all who're dead in Christ. We look forward to our mortal bodies putting on immortality, death being swallowed up in victory, and the full revelation of Christ's glory and reign over the new heavens and earth where we will live with Him, redeemed and restored for eternity. So, we pray that Jesus would come quickly.

But there're times when the preaching of Jesus's return is taken out of context – such as when “*hellfire and brimstone*” preaching that's heavy on Law, judgment, and eternal damnation, leave people feeling lost and condemned in the absence of any Gospel being proclaimed. At other times, a “*prosperity gospel*” is proclaimed, using today's Gospel parable as a proof text that God rewards good works and faith with wealth, health, and happiness. So unless you allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, looking at Jesus' other parables describing the Kingdom of Heaven, you too, might get the idea that Jesus is teaching about an angry God or that He's promoting works righteousness, so you get a healthy return on investment.

In today's parable, Jesus is teaching is a two-fold exhortation and encouragement of:

1. Don't forget who your Master is.
2. And don't forget who you are... the servant of the Master.

He is teaching His disciples on the Mount of Olives regarding the End Times, just a few days before He would be betrayed and hung on the cross. In the parable, He tells of a generous and trusting master who was going on a journey. Because he is generous and trusting, he entrusts three different servants with his riches. He didn't have to entrust them with anything, but He is gracious and generous. It's a huge amount of wealth. One talent is approximately worth twenty years wages for labor. And an important point to remember is that the master retains ownership of the talents while entrusting them to the temporary custody of his servants, each according to his ability. Then he went away.

The first two servants know the master to be generous and trusting. They believe that as his servants, they rightfully should serve him by seeking to increase his wealth. So took what had been entrusted to them, went at once, worked, and doubled their investment. The third servant, however, not only didn't go away at once, but he also didn't even attempt to increase the master's wealth. He dug a hole in the ground and hid it.

After a long time, the master returned. Because the talents were entrusted and not given, the master came to settle the accounts with the servants. The first two came forward and were able to give him back twice what he had entrusted to them, and the master commended them for their efforts. But the third servant was afraid he might lose what was entrusted to him, so he hid it away and kept it safe. When he came forward, he said:

***“Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, <sup>25</sup> so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.”*** (Matthew 25:24–25)

The master declares the servant wicked and slothful – and he gives the order to:

***“... cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*** (Matthew 25:30)

... a euphemism for eternal damnation in hell.

The master in the parable represents Jesus. He’s about to leave for a long time. It would only be a few days until He would be beaten with an inch of His life and be nailed to Calvary’s cross to suffer God’s entire wrath against, and pay the wages of, the sins of all mankind with His precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. Three days later He would be raised from the dead and in forty more, He’d ascend into heaven. But make no mistake. He has promised to return.

With the parable, Jesus is exhorting and encouraging you to not forget who your Master is. He is our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is:

***“... merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”*** (Psalm 86:15)

The parable represents our lives waiting for His return. Christendom has been waiting for almost 2,000 years. And like the parable, while we wait, each has been entrusted a portion of our Lord’s wealth... each according to his ability. Like the master in the parable, our Lord is a gracious loving God who gives freely and abundantly. It’s who He is. It’s what He does.

Irenaeus of Lyons, a second century defender of the Christian faith, describes it this way:

***“In the beginning... God form[ed] Adam, not as if He stood in need of man, but that He might have [someone] upon whom to confer His benefits.”*** (“Irenæus against Heresies,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol 1, 478)

Don’t forget who you are. Even though you are an unworthy and undeserving servant of our Lord, He has conferred His benefits on you, and He has called you to be His steward. As you look around at your neighbors, some have been given more. Some less. God entrusts His blessings as He wills. If you’ve been entrusted with less than your neighbor, it doesn’t mean that God loves you less. Like different parts of the body, each has a different work to perform with what God has entrusted. (cf: 1 Corinthians 12:12)

All that you have and all that you are belongs to God. It’s bought and paid for by Jesus’ blood and righteousness. He desires that you use what He has entrusted to you to glorify His Name and

to serve others. He doesn't want it buried in a hole. He wants you to use it to care for His people, and His church. Not out of duty or obligation, but out of the love for Him and love of your neighbor.

And that takes us back to the third servant in the parable. This servant did not know the master. Although all three worked for the same master, the third servant perceived the master to be something that he was not:

**“... a hard man, reaping where [he had] not sow[n], and gathering where [he had] scattered no seed.”** (Matthew 25:24)

Don't forget who your Master is. Perhaps there are times when you have forgotten and perceived God as a hard man. Maybe it was when you lost your job in a corporate restructuring, or when you lost a good friend or family member to death, or when you heard the word cancer or some other tragic diagnosis. You and I bury our treasures in wasteful lifestyles, in material possessions, and in retirement funds that will outlive us. We bury ourselves in work and play rather than putting our riches to work for the Master so that He might multiply our good works and deeds.

The Master is returning soon, and you and I will be called to give account. Brothers and sisters in Christ, repent. Repent of not loving your Master with your whole heart, soul, and mind. Repent of your failure of being a good steward of God's abundant blessings and gifts entrusted to you, using them to serve yourself rather than your neighbor. God hears your repentant prayers and forgives you all of your sins.

Yet God has given you with an even greater treasure than earthly riches of times, talents, and material possessions. He has given you eternal riches in Christ Jesus that are priceless and imperishable. God the Father entrusted your eternal salvation into Jesus' hands, and as Suffering Servant of all, went to work to seek and save the lost. (cf: Luke 19:10) After keeping God's Law perfectly in your stead, He was willingly crucified for you and for all mankind so that you would be made righteous in Him. After three days in the grave, God the Father accepted His Servant Son's sacrifice and raised Him from the dead, declaring that He forgives you all your sins, and that you too, will one day rise to live with Him forever.

Unlike the wealth entrusted to the servants in the parable, you actually possess the riches of the Gospel and they're yours forever. In Baptism God granted you all the gifts that Christ won for you on the cross: forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation. Your once sin-stained robe has been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. (cf: Revelation 7:14) Each new day you awaken to a new life in Christ. Your conscience is freed from the burden of the guilt and shame of your sin. In the preaching of the Gospel the Holy Spirit works not only to create faith, but to sanctify you and keep you in the true faith. As you partake of Jesus' body and blood in His Holy Supper, God once again pours out His abundant gifts of forgiveness of sins and strengthening of faith unto life everlasting.

Because of the sinful nature that you and all mankind inherited from Adam, there're times that you despise God's gifts and hide them away. You bury them in a hole and ignore them – not appreciating the price that was paid. You don't have to live this way any longer. Repent and

receive Jesus' forgiveness. Live your days by the power of the Holy Spirit who strengthens you to live as a new creation. It's no longer you who live but Christ who lives in you. (cf: Galatians 2:20)

You not only know *who* the Master is – you *know* the Master. He has revealed Himself to you in Word and Sacrament. You have His promise. He brought you to faith and He sustains your faith. And that makes you a servant of the Master. You were bought with a price, (cf: 1 Corinthians 7:23) and as His servant He has entrusted you with the riches of His Gospel and He desires that you declare the riches of His Gospel into the world and put it to work, telling others about the sacrificial love, and gracious riches of forgiveness, life, and salvation, that the Master desires to pour out on all people.

Christ has gone away on a journey but has promised to return to settle His accounts. That day will come:

***“... like a thief in the night.”*** (1 Thessalonians 5:2)

Although it sounds pretty scary, unlike the third servant in the parable, you have nothing to fear. As you heard in our Epistle lesson:

***“For God has not destined us for [a day of] wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we are awake [in life] or asleep [in death] we might live with him [in eternity].”*** (1 Thessalonians 5:9–10)

As a redeemed servant of the Master on that day your Savior will say to you:

***“Well done, good and faithful servant.... Enter into the joy of your master.”***  
(Matthew 25:21)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,  
Amen.