

WELL DONE!

Maybe it is a natural part of growing older, but I find myself increasingly interested in being thought of as someone who worked hard and did a good job. Throughout my life, I have heard my father or others say about this or that person, he or she is a really “hard worker,” or “they did good work.” You have men like John Habiger or Jim Murr, who can do just about anything, but there is one thing you can count on, when the job is done, it will have been done right. And of course, a reputation like that isn’t built over night. It takes a number of years and I’m sure they made some mistakes along the way. I think most of us would like to enjoy a reputation like that; that we were good workers and we did our best.

In the scriptures we were reading and studying this week, there is a passage that puts this idea into a really incredible perspective for us. It’s the parable Jesus told, sometime referred to as “the Parable of the Talents” found in **Matthew 25:14-30**. Please open your Bibles and let’s read this passage together.

"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. 15) To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16) He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. 17) So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. 18) But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. 19) Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. 20) And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' 21) His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' 22) And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' 23) His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' 24) He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, 25) so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' 26) But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? 27) Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. 28) So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29) For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 30) And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Now, as we get into this scripture there are several things that immediately commands our attention. For example, there is the amount of money involved. We kind of gloss over this

because the word “talent” doesn’t really communicate much to us. We are vaguely aware that it is a measure of money, but we may not realize how much money. It was a lot! A talent was a weight, roughly equivalent to the amount of weight a Roman Soldier could carry on his back. So we are talking about, again roughly speaking, 75-100 pounds of gold or silver. If it was talents of gold, at today’s prices, we are talking about in excess of 1.4 million dollars per talent. That means the first man was given in something in the neighborhood of 7 million dollars. The second man was given almost 3 million. The man given one talent was given the equivalent of 1.4 million dollars. If it was silver talents, it still amounts to a huge amount of money. 1 talent of silver at today’s prices would be worth \$22,000 dollars, so five talents would be \$110,000.00. The man given two talents received the equivalent of \$44,000. So we are not talking about small potatoes here. He was probably entrusting them with the bulk of his wealth.

Verse 15 says he divided it up the way that he did, *“to each according to his ability.”* I would say that each of them had some kind of ability wouldn’t you? Don’t think of these as simple household servants. These were men who had worked for the man a long while. They had no doubt been very involved and perhaps responsible for much of his wealth already, and now he going to leave them, but he’s entrusting to them his money so that they might make him even more. So tell me, how many people do you know that you would trust with 1 million of your dollars, much less with 3 or 7 million, while you go on an extended vacation? We would be looking for someone with the ability of say...a Warren Buffet or Bill Gates!

Before we go on let’s ask ourselves, what is the point Jesus is trying to make with this parable thus far? Well, undoubtedly it is talking about the investment in spiritual blessings God has entrusted to us. This probably includes our salvation, the forgiveness of our sins, the peace and mercy which we enjoy, as well the hope that we have. It includes the abilities, wisdom, experiences, resources and opportunities God gives each of us in bountiful measure. The man going away is undoubtedly meant to refer to Christ who has come and gone, but will come again.

Well, **verses 16-17** tell us that the two men who had received the 5 and the 2 talents, they went and immediately began working with what had been entrusted to them, and both of them doubled the amount! The third guy did not do that. Instead he went and dug a hole in the ground and buried the money.

Verse 19 says, *“after a long time the mast of those servants came and settled accounts with them.”* You can’t help but wonder if Jesus was trying to give his followers a clue that when he left, it would be a long time before he came back; that it wasn’t simply going to be a few years.

At any rate, he came back, and what does he do. Jesus said, he *“settled accounts with them.”* The word that he uses there implies not simply the idea of seeing how each of them did, but also of rewarding them for their effort. The first man comes in, and he says, *“Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.”* Pretty impressive, huh? And notice **verse 21**, what his master says to him: *“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”* Now, I

don't know but I don't think I had ever noticed this before, but did you hear what he said? He said, "*You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.*" Do you think of 7 million dollars as "a little?" Had you ever noticed that? But contrast that with the reward the man is going to get. Remember, he has been faithful over a little—7 million dollars, so now the Lord's is going to set him over much! What do you think the Lord is trying to tell us about the reward that is in store for those who serve Him well?

The second man comes in and he says essentially the same thing. You gave me two talents and I have made two talents more. So the master says essentially the same thing to him—even though it is 4 million dollars less than the other guy. He says, "*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.*" So I get the idea that it doesn't matter whether you receive the five talents or the two talents, or even the one talent. Everyone has the opportunity please the master.

Well, **verse 24**, the third man comes in, and if he has been comparing notes with the other two, how do you think he is feeling about now? Pretty nervous, right? So he comes in and immediately begins making excuses. He says, "*Master, I knew you to be a hard man*"—that would be sure to win him over—"*reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.*" Essentially he was saying, "*I didn't do anything with what you entrusted to me, but at least I didn't lose it either.*"

So how does that sit with the master? Is he happy? Does he feel sympathy for him? No, nothing like that. Listen to his first words—**verse 26**: "*YOU WICKED AND SLOTHFUL SERVANT!*" Oooh, I don't think this went over too well. He goes on to say, "*You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed?*" My ESV version has a question mark after that, as if to say, "*did you really think I was that kind of person and yet you did absolutely nothing!*" Look at **verse 27**. He says, "*You ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.*" Money-lending institutions and Temples in the ancient world were often used as banks and were considered very safe and profitable places to store your money. So the man was saying couldn't you have at least done the very minimum and earned me some interest money?

Now notice **verse 28**: He says—and again I don't think I had ever noticed this—but he says, "*So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.*" The man who was given the five talents to work with on behalf of his master now has ten talents of his own—14 million dollars!!!! That five talents that he worked with? It's now his! That five talents more that he made? That now his too! The master gave him everything. Think about that! Everything that had belonged to the master now belonged to him. Do you get the feeling Jesus was trying to tell us something?

Verse 29 and following: "*For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 30) And cast*

the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

All right, let's look at some observations from this passage and see if we can make some applications of it to ourselves.

What was Jesus trying to communicate with this parable? When you look at it, especially in light of its context, it is easy to see two points of emphasis. First of all we learn that God wants us to take all that he gives us, and make the best use of it we can in keeping with our ability, and do it for his glory and for His kingdom. It is His intention to honor us one day in ways that go beyond our imagination because we have proven to be good and faithful servants. Secondly, this parable emphasizes that God will hold us responsible. There is a day when accounts will be settled. He has an absolutely precise record of everything He has given us (2 Corinthians 5:10, also take note of verse 11). It is time we recognized that he didn't give all of that just so we could live well and enjoy our 60 or 80 years in this world. He gave it to us so we could work for His glory. What did Paul say in **Titus 2:14**, when he talked about Christ, "*who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*"

That is why he has given us life, given us everything we have, every blessing. In **1 Corinthians 4:7**, Paul raised the question, "*What you have that you did not receive?*" And our answer to that question is...? Everything we have, from before we were born, has been given to us, hasn't it. Everything! The truth is you are only sitting here and breathing because of His goodness and kindness towards you. Everything you have: your life, your health (whatever it is), your family, your friends, your experiences, your education, your opportunities, your wealth, your home your cars, your cell phone, your ability to think, speak and move; everything is from him. When you add it all up, it might be even more than seven million dollars, wouldn't it?

Of course, we do not all get the same. He gives according to our ability, which incidentally, even that comes from God! So we do not all have the same start in life, the same health, the same circumstances in life, education, job, income, family, friends, experiences. We are each one different, but each one of us have received much from His hand, and what have we done with it? Do you realize that if you are twenty years old, you have been given 7,300 days in which to live and work for God. 7,300 days! If you are 40 years old, you can double that, or if you are 60 you can triple that, and how many of those have been devoted to increasing what belongs to God?

Imagine that you have worked for someone for 20 or 40 or even 60 years, and the time has come for you to retire. What do you want to hear? "Well Done!" or "You have been all but useless to us!"? Think about it.

What have you done with all of the time God has given you? What have you done with the health and strength He has given you? What have you done with all of the family and friends He has given you? What have you done with the homes He has given you, the cars, the wealth,

the opportunities that came your way? What have you done? Is He going to say to you, “Well done! Boy, you were a good worker! You did so much good! You worked hard, and you worked long and you worked well. You took what I gave you and you did something with it!” Is that what He will say about you? “Well done good and faithful servant!” Or, are you concerned that you might hear something else?

Now, you might be thinking, just what is it that God wants me to be doing? What do I need or have to do in order to be a good worker? Do I have to be an apostle, an evangelist, a missionary, a door-knocker? What is it that he wants me to be doing with everything he has entrusted to me?

The answer to that question is, “Look around you,” and the answer to that question is in verses 31 through the end of that chapter. If you want to know what God wants you to be doing with everything that He has entrusted to you, (and that includes everything you have and are), then look around at the people around you, not just here in this auditorium this morning, but everywhere you live or have ever lived. Look at the people you have worked with, went to school with, been best friends with, were neighbors to, who were your family. Look at the people who have been sick or in trouble, or strangers, or alone. What did you do with those people? Did you do what Jesus did? Did you lay aside your status, did you give up what was comfortable for you. Did you take off your coat and roll up your sleeves and get involved with those people?

You see, too many people have bought into the devil’s lie that the only thing you are going to hear God say to you one day, “Well done!” even if all you do is just for you. Did you obey the gospel to help anyone else? No, that’s not the reason why we obeyed the gospel. We did that to help ourselves. Do you come to worship in order to help anyone else? No, we come to worship so we won’t be counted absent and lose our souls, and probably because we receive some personal satisfaction from being with some good people and from worshipping God! So many Christians have the idea that if they just live a good life, and what they mean by that is, stay on the good side of the law; and if they are faithful in coming to worship and Bible study, that one day they are going to hear God say, “*Well done, good and faithful servant.*”

I think we had better think again, because we do those things while consuming all of our time, and all of our health, and all of our circumstances, and all of resources, all for purpose of pleasing ourselves. We give very little thought to God’s kingdom. We give very little thought to the very real needs of very real people. We are too busy living lives that are self-centered and self-serving.

Let me ask a question before I bring this lesson to a close. *What do you think the three men were thinking, or feeling, when it came time for the accounts to be settled?* Do you imagine the one who had been given the five talents was worried about the account that he had to give for himself? I kind of doubt it. Nor probably was the man who had been given the two talents. What about the man who had been given the one talent? Do you think he approached that

meeting with a great deal of confidence and optimism? No, I suspect he was dreading it with mortal fear.

What about you? As you think about that day when you too will have to “settle up,” is it something you are excited about and looking forward to because you have been such a good and faithful servant? Or is it something you are apprehensive about because in reality, you are that wicked and slothful servant?

In closing, let’s keep these three things in mind:

- 1) Every one of us have been incredibly blessed by the Lord; not all in the same way to the same degree, but all of us have been blessed incredibly. He has more than made it possible for us to be a blessing to others in so many ways. If we are doing little more in life than just taking care of ourselves and our own, we may be, in fact, guilty of being wicked, slothful servants.
- 2) Our excuses are not going to work. The excuses we tell ourselves are going to melt like butter on a hot day! Remember, the master gave to each man according to his ability. Remember, in **Luke 12:48**, Jesus said, *“To whom much is given, much is required!”*
- 3) The words, “Well done!” are going to come with greater riches than we can possibly imagine. It won’t just be a gold watch or a nice plaque. Jesus said, *“He who has been faithful over a little, will be set over much!”* I don’t have any idea what the heavenly reward is going to be, but I know this much, it will surpass anything we have ever seen or heard of, or even imagined.

Invitation

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