

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD

In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 Jesus emphasized that those who are truly His SERVE Him. We are not saved by serving but if we truly have a saving faith the expectation is that the fruit will be seen in our service. In this parable three servants of Lord are entrusted with a stewardship of life “each according to his own ability”. The two faithful ones used what was given them to further the Master’s interests, while the unfaithful one buried the talent given to him.

Matthew 25:19 (NKJV)

19 After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

Note the language here: “After a long time”.

“This one statement fixes the interpretation of the parable to our own age. The Lord will be away during the great tribulation too, but those days are to be shortened (24:22). It is the present age that is marked by the prolonged absence of the Lord.” – **John Phillips**

The idea of investing in the normal routine of life coupled with the language of a long delay does not fit the idea of the tribulation period. Note there is also “delay” in the previous two parables showing a common theme related to not knowing when the Lord will come.

Matthew 24:48 (NKJV)

48 But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’

Matthew 25:5 (NKJV)

5 But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

Ever since the beginning of the Church age, the mantra has been that the Lord is going to return SOON. And yet, when there is seemingly a delay it is easy for people to get lax or think it is not going to happen any time soon. It’s easy to lose sight of imminency when a long time passes. That is the challenge of the Church age.

It is of such a nature that Peter felt compelled to write...

2 Peter 3:8–9 (ESV)

8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

“The lesson of this parable is that of serving the Lord responsibly while awaiting His return. Readiness for His return also entails responsible action while He is away, not for a limited time, but for a time of unstipulated length.” – **Robert Thomas**

Matthew 25:20–21 (NKJV)

20 “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.’

21 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.’

This man started as a slave who was a steward but being faithful in that role he received commendation from the master and was made ruler over many things and was invited into the joy of his lord.

It is interesting that he was given 5 talents which in value amounted to about 100 years’ worth of work and yet the lord saw it as being “faithful over a few things”. What a paradox. No matter how much we have been given in the great scheme of things it is “a little thing” entrusted to us for just a little time. And yet the ramifications of it are GREAT!

Being faithful with what God has given us results in being given an even greater role of service in the kingdom. We were created to serve! We see this from the very beginning as God put Adam in the garden of Eden to “tend and keep it” (Gen. 2:15). Even in the eternal state in Rev. 22:3 it says, “and His servants shall serve Him.” Our reward in heaven will evidently relate to service and our position to rule (cf. Rev. 22:3-5).

“This parable suggests [rewards] involve enlarged opportunities to serve Him when the millennial kingdom is established and to experience the joy of the master as it is done. But it also ties those rewards to what the believer does presently, during the time the Master is away.” – ***The Moody Bible Commentary***

Matthew 25:22–23 (NKJV)

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.’

23 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.’

Note the one given only 2 talents and was faithful with them and is given the very same commendation and reward as the one faithful with 5.

“Not all are expected to produce the same results, but all are to be faithful with what they have.” – ***Tim LaHaye***

There is a great lesson here. We are not in competition with others. We all are uniquely gifted and that is what we are accountable for. We are not accountable for the gifting of others – only for what God has given us. As Christians, we are all uniquely gifted. Our giftedness is like our finger print – unique to us. No one else has exactly what you have been given to serve God. This and this alone is what you are responsible for (cf. 1 Pet. 4:10).

Matthew 25:24–25 (NKJV)

24 “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.

25 And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’

Note all three of these examples called the master “Lord” including this one who is shown to be wicked and unfaithful. They all knew they had a stewardship responsibility. The difference is in how they responded to the responsibility.

This third servant in contrast to the first two is shown to be wicked (v. 26). This servant who was unfaithful offers nothing but an excuse for why he did not make a profit.

The “blame game” is the oldest game in the world. This wicked servant was full of excuses and in effect sought to blame the character of the master for how he had acted.

This servant's great wickedness is seen in his defamation of the master's character. There is absolutely nothing in the context to suggest the master was harsh, unmerciful, or unfair. This servant thinks the worst of the master's character and has the audacity to say so.

Being “**hard**” (Gk. skleros) is the idea of harsh, severe, or difficult, instead of being gracious and kind (cf. Jn. 6:60; Acts 26:14; James 3:4; Jude 15).

He claims that he knew the master was one to reap where he had not sown and to gather where he had not planted. This impeaches the master's character as being one who is unfair, exploiting people – who lacks mercy – and who is a taker and not a giver.

This just shows that in spite of his profession, he really didn't know the master. He didn't really know his character. At core, this slave's problem was a wrongful view of his master.

Consequently, he says he acted out of fear and not out of love. He had the kind of fear born out of hostility instead of a godly fear which is loving reverence. He did not have the fear of reverential awe, but rather of irreverent contempt.

“This slave represents the professing Christian whose limited knowledge of God leads him to conclude that He is distant, uncaring, unjust, and undependable. Instead of judging themselves in light of God's inerrant Word, such people judge God in light their own perverted perceptions.” – **John MacArthur**

Being full of excuses and insulting blame the slave, evidently in a self-justifying way then said, “**Look, there you have what is yours.**”

After all he hadn't lost anything. It was all still there – nothing gained – nothing lost – and he expected that was good enough. But with God total fruitlessness is a mark of the unregenerate. All living things grow. This is the pattern and the overall rule of life.

“At least he understood that what he had been given belonged to his master. He said, “**you have what is yours.**” Many modern servants of God think that when God gives them something, it no longer belongs to God; it belongs to *them* and they can do with it as they please.” – **David Guzik**

Prosperity gospel teachers have a theology that makes it all about them instead of it being all about God. This wicked servant made it all about him, instead of all about the master.

The last 3 parables show that the fruit of preparedness and faithfulness indicates the character of those awaiting the Lord's return. In each parable character is manifested in works. We are not saved by works but we are saved by a faith that works.

“[This last] slave portrays the unregenerate church member who has no spiritual fruit in his life and no spiritual worship in his heart. He is blind to the Lord's kindness, grace, compassion, mercy, honor, majesty, and glory because he has never surrendered to the Lord's sovereignty and grace.” – **John MacArthur**

“A life with no evidence of good works is not a life of authentic faith in Christ, for ‘faith without works is dead’ (James 2:20).” – **Henry M. Morris**