

Chapter 25 of Matthew is all about Christ's return. The last part of the chapter describes His return on the final Day of Judgment where all the people who have ever lived on this earth will be raised and divided into two groups, the believers on His right and the unbelievers on His left. That moment will determine our eternal destiny—either the inheritance of heaven or the eternal punishment meant for Satan.

The determination is made by the state of our faith when we die. So we need to be prepared for that day. Therefore in the first part of this chapter Jesus tells two parables about being ready for Christ's return. The first is the parable of the 10 virgins describing how we are to be ready by keeping our lamps filled with oil. That is a picture of keeping our faith alive and burning bright by filling up with the Oil of the Spirit in the Word of God. The second parable is the parable of the Talents, which describes being ready in terms of serving God faithfully. That is what we will consider today for our sermon text. **Matthew 25:14-30**

14 "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.'"

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How do these two parables strike you, the parable of the 10 virgins and the parable of the Talents? Are they frightening when you see the different ways that you can lose out on eternal life, or are they encouraging? Both parables are about confessing Christians. All ten virgins were waiting for the bridegroom to come. They professed a love for Jesus and are waiting for His return, but half of them weren't ready, and were locked out of heaven. In the parable of the Talents all three are described as God's servants. They too, all represent confessing believers. Yet one of them was cast out into outer darkness. Both of these parables picture for us the truth of what Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount. "Not

everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” Matt. 7:21

The fact that it is possible to believe in Jesus and be waiting for His return and yet still be cast out, should be a frightening thing. It should lead us all to a careful examination of our own life and faith. But even more so, we can see the tremendous love of our Saviour in these parables. Think about why Jesus is telling these parables. Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us. He sacrificed His own life so that we could be forgiven by God and received into paradise. He dearly wants us to be with Him in heaven. So He is warning us against the corruption in our own heart. He knows how we are so adept at deceiving ourselves to think we are following Christ when in reality we are only serving ourselves. In His great love that doesn't want any to be lost, He gives these warnings and encouragement to continue to live in true faith and make sure that we are ready when our Saviour returns. That is what this parable is really about.

Jesus Calls to us in Love—Be Ready!

-I- He Warns Us of a False Faith.

The Bible describes our relationship to God in many different ways. Probably our favourite is being called children of God. That describes the close, loving endearing relationship with our Father. It describes a relationship where God loves us tenderly and takes care of us perfectly. He also describes us as sheep, which speaks of the way He leads and guides us and protects us daily. Then God also describes us as His servants, or literally His slaves, which reminds us that we belong to God and our whole purpose in life is to serve Him. This is the picture Jesus uses in our text today.

At first glance this parable makes it sound like you get to “enter into the Joy of your Master,” by being a good and faithful servant. But how did we become servants of God? It was only because God called us by His Grace, cleansed us through the blood of His Son, and sanctified us by His Holy Spirit. It is a privilege to be chosen to be God's servant.

Jesus warns us that it is possible to think you are a servant when you are not. The third servant buried his talent in the ground. In other words, he claimed to be a servant of God, but he didn't serve God with the Talent that God gave him. That proves that he wasn't really a servant of God. He didn't have true faith, for Saving Faith is a Serving Faith. The other two servants knew the love of their master and therefore eagerly and joyfully served Him.

We need to understand what it means to bury your talent in the ground. As we said, it means to not serve God with the Talent He has given you. That can describe a person who confesses to be a Christian but doesn't live like a Christian. They don't go to church. They don't read their Bible. They disregard some of God's commands and live in sin. They clearly are not serving God. But, this third servant may also represent a confessing Christian who is very active in their church. They may be very zealous in doing everything good and right. But they may still not be serving God but burying their talent. The Pharisees and Priests of Jesus' day are a perfect example of that. They did everything according to God's law, but they only did that to show everyone how good and righteous they were. That's not really serving God, it's serving themselves. Wanting to feel good about themselves and look good in the eyes of others. That's not serving God!

This third servant probably thought he had a good excuse, but it only revealed the wickedness in his heart and his utter lack of saving faith. He blamed his lack of service on his master. He thought of God as a harsh, demanding God, rather than knowing Him as the Loving God who gave the greatest sacrifice to save us and make us His servants. As we talked about two weeks ago, this servant showed that he didn't really know God or Jesus his

Saviour. Because he didn't know the love of God in Christ, he didn't serve God.

You know, we are all pretty good at making up excuses for not really serving the Lord. We have our excuses for not going to worship in Church, or for not keeping some commandment. We convince ourselves that we have no choice in our circumstance. Surely God will understand. Our excuses may seem legitimate to us but Jesus is not fooled by our excuses. He sees what is in the heart. The lack of service to God indicates a lack of love and faith. We should take a good sobering look at what Jesus commanded about this third servant. “Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Many people object to the teaching of hell because it just seems too cruel. It's unfathomable that a loving God would ever do that. But Jesus describes a very just and fair judgement. Those who don't want anything to do with God will get what they want. To be cast into outer darkness is to be separated from God who is light. Apart from God there is darkness, separated from all goodness and joy. He also says, “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Gnashing of teeth is something we do when we are angry with ourselves for missing out on an opportunity. If someone believes in God but doesn't receive God's forgiveness in Christ, they remain in their sins and receive God's punishment for those sins. What greater cause for gnashing of teeth than knowing that you could be enjoying all the blessings in heaven. God gave His Son to save you and wanted you to come with Him. He was reaching out to you with His love and grace, but you didn't take it.

That's why Jesus wept over Jerusalem and said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” Jesus loves you and doesn't want that to happen to anyone.

-II- He Urges Us to an Active Faith.

Faith shows itself in acts of love and service. Is there such a thing as a faith that doesn't worship God or that doesn't keep God's commandments? No, “Faith works in love.”

The Apostle John sums up God's will for us. He says, “This is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another.” 1 John 3:23 Serving the Lord begins with believing in Jesus Christ as our Saviour. Saving faith is not just believing that Jesus is real or even that He is the Son of God. Saving faith begins with knowing that we are unworthy servants, that we have all failed to serve God as we should. Saving faith therefore is not showing God how good we are, but is falling down at Jesus' feet confessing our sin and guilt, trusting in Jesus for His forgiveness and righteousness.

Saving faith is believing in Jesus for our forgiveness, **“AND** that we **“love one another.”** Faith that receives God's love and forgiveness is eager to show love and forgiveness to others. Paul describes true faith nicely in his letter to Titus 2:11-14 “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us. He redeemed us from all our sins with His own blood shed on the cross so that we could be His own special people. That kind of sacrificial love compels us to be “zealous for good works.”

Did you notice the first two servants were eager to serve their master. It says they “went at once.” Immediately! They were overjoyed to serve their loving master. They were honoured that He trusted them with His possessions and were eager to show Him they were

worthy of that trust. We know our service to God still comes way short of what it should be. We know that the good we do doesn't make us worthy of God's favour and salvation. But we rejoice that God's grace in Christ receives our feeble service and is pleased by it. We are overwhelmed that the Holy, Righteous God would look at us and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." That is purely by the grace of God. And that makes us want to serve Him all the more.

So just what are these Talents that God entrusts to us to use in His service? In the parable it is an amount of money. But it is interesting that, in English at least, the sound of the Greek word is also our word for talents or abilities, and that is very fitting. These Talents represent everything that God has given to us. They include our body and life, our money and possessions, our family and home, and our talents and abilities.

In terms of money, five talents may not sound like much, but it was a huge sum of money. A Talent was a weight of gold or silver. One talent weighed about 70 pounds. 5 Talents of gold therefore would be worth about \$21 million. Even One Talent would be worth over \$4 million. That is an indication of the tremendous value of everything God has entrusted to us. It is of inestimable value. Everything is entrusted to us by God and so we are to serve God with everything we have. With our money and possessions, we use them in God pleasing ways: supporting ourselves and our families, but also using them to serve others and support the work of God's kingdom on earth.

We serve God with our talents and abilities; using our voice to sing His praises; using every talent to give glory to God. If we have some skill we use it in God's Kingdom to build His church or help His children. Look for ways to serve God with our whole life, every day. That's what the Apostle Paul said, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." We honour God when we resist temptation. We glorify God when we trust Him for our salvation and for the day to day trials of life. When we choose honesty and integrity over deceit, sacrifice over pleasure, love over selfishness, then God's name is exalted by our life.

Jesus gave His life for us so that we could be His servants. He has also promised that He will come again to raise all the dead and take His faithful servants with Him to heaven. Therefore let us serve Him faithfully and joyfully. Let's make sure we continue in genuine faith—the faith which confesses our sins and rejoices in God's full and free forgiveness and salvation, and the faith which serves the Lord with gladness. How amazing it will be to hear Him say to us on that day, "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." There we will be able to serve Him in even greater ways for all eternity.

Amen.