

Matthew 25:14-30
November 15, 2020

Well, it is official! Even before we have had a chance to savor the taste of our Thanksgiving turkey or have a slice or two of pumpkin pie, the Christmas season is in full swing as I witnessed the first home adorned in exterior lights. With the dawning of the season come a variety of Christmas movies, such as *A Christmas Carol*, based on Charles Dickens's classic novel featuring the main character, Ebenezer Scrooge who is a businessman known for his catchphrase, "Bah, humbug," As he has aged, he has become an angry, bitter, heartless, and greedy human being. Dickens describes him thus, "The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, made his eyes red, his thin lips blue, and he spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice." He has worked so hard at preserving every dollar he has earned that reality to him has become distorted thinking everyone is out to get him. He no longer sees the good in those around him and finds himself alone Christmas Eve.

Perhaps Scrooge might be compared to the third servant in our parable. Something is amiss with this last servant and his relationship to his master. His attitude and mindset are sharply contrasted to the first two servants who readily acknowledge the abundance and lavishness of the gifts their master has entrusted them with. It appears their relationship with the master is one of mutual trust. The master trusts the abilities of each and therefore entrusts them with extravagant and ridiculously large sums of money. While not directed specifically in any way what to do with this money during the masters absence, clearly the servants relationship with the master gives way to how the money should be handled in order to provide the best return for its owner. These two servants understand the master's trust in them and do not seem to be in fear of the master should they fail in utilizing his gifts.

The third servant; however, does not seem to have the same relationship with the master identifying him as a harsh man and afraid of the master's wrath that it prevents him from doing anything else than preserving the money he has been given by burying it in the ground. Perhaps, like Scrooge, this third servant has become so angry and bitter over the years that he no longer can see the good of the master or those around him.

Whatever the case, he is made aware of the fact that by not utilizing the masters gifts to the best of his abilities will in turn lead him to the fate of not having anything in the future and be relegated to a life void of celebrating in the joy of the master and instead relegated to one of darkness and dread. This image is not unlike that presented to Scrooge as he is visited by his deceased business partner, Jacob Marley.

Just days before Jesus' death, I am not sure this entire parable is about money, whether they should take the money they have and go invest it in a bank as opposed to burying it in the ground. Rather, I wonder if the intent for the disciples and for all disciples who follow is how we are to live in light of Jesus' death and resurrection and during the time we wait for His promised return.

Discipleship is a critical aspect of faith. We have received more than we can possibly comprehend in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have graciously and abundantly been given forgiveness and eternal life, the unending love of the Father revealed in the Son and poured out upon us by the Holy Spirit. Grace upon grace. The gospel of the good news of Jesus Christ has been revealed and entrusted to the church to share with the world.

What we do here and now matters. Our response to the lavishness of God's grace and mercy is critical. Not for our own salvation because that has been made secure in the cross of Christ and in his resurrection. What we do with the gifts we have entrusted matters precisely because of what the Master has already done for us. A life in Christ is a life that seeks to further the kingdom of God first and foremost. It is a life lived in thanksgiving for what we have been given. It is a life that lives not in fear of the One who has given so much but rather a life that trusts in the Giver to sustain, provide, and to love us even when we may fail in our attempts to spread the good news or to utilize the gifts we have been given for the benefit of God's good pleasure. Our lives, our faith, our abilities, our gifts, our possessions--is to be spent and put into circulation. Our lives are to be expended in God's service, becoming thereby the source of further blessings for others and for ourselves.

Notice, the master's repeated words in responding to the first two servants, "Enter into the joy of your master." Other biblical translations include, "From now on be my partner" (*The Message*), "Let's celebrate together" (*New Living*

Translation), and “Come and share your master’s happiness” (*New International Version*). I believe them to be critical to our understanding of Jesus’ words and who he is. Life in Christ, while at times faced with challenges and suffering, is one that ultimately, despite all this, is marked by joy, happiness, and celebration. Not alone, but together with our gracious Lord. This is a picture of the kingdom of God. Living in the joy of Christ. Celebrating the goodness of God. Growing in a richer, deeper, fuller relationship with the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.