

The End-Time Life, Part 1: A Gospel-Centered Life

25th Sun. after Pent. – 11/19/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Matthew 25:14-30 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 14, [Jesus said,] **“For it (God’s heavenly reign) will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.”**

Introduction

✘ Most people – even those who understand, as we do, that God’s Word is not in favor of gambling or playing the lottery – fantasize about what they would do if they won all of that money. There’s a plethora of options from selfish to selfless and maybe even godly things that you might think of doing with a sudden influx of cash.

➔ Imagine, then, how the servants Jesus mentions in His parable that we are looking at today must have felt. Now understand that a “talent” in the ancient world was a lot of money – the equivalent of 6000 days’ wages or about 20 years of salary!¹ So, if we took the current average yearly salary in Colorado of \$66,000² that would mean that in today’s economy the first servant received \$6,600,000, the second received \$2,640,000 and the third servant only received \$1,320,000.

➔ So, their master was extremely generous, showing that he trusted each of them to care for a portion of his fortune while he went away to take care of business elsewhere. He even allowed each servant a certain amount of latitude to decide how to use the part given to him to further the master’s business concerns in his absence.

I. The “reign of heaven is like...”

✘ The first verse in our text, verse 14 begins by saying, “For it will be like...”. Before we can go any further, it’s imperative that we all understand what this “it” is that Jesus is referring to.

➔ It was actually at the beginning of last Sunday’s parable about the five wise and five foolish virgins that Jesus answered the question. There He says, “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like...” (Mt. 25:1).

✘ So, if I were to ask all of you, “What is the ‘kingdom of heaven’?” My bet is that most of you would say that it is talking about heaven, right? But you see that is not what Jesus is talking about here. The problem is that our modern English usage of the word “kingdom” makes us think of a static location, a place, or a territory. But when Jesus uses this phrase He’s not talking about a place, but instead a kingly activity, a state of existence where the King is reigning and ruling in and among His subjects.

➔ In fact, the first-century Jews longed for and understood that salvation from God did not mean first that God’s people were “going up” to heaven, but instead that God would “come down” to save His people by “reigning” among them where they were at.

✘ And so, when we understand that here in Matthew, Jesus is using parables to teach about how we, here on earth are to live as His people and prepare ourselves and others for His final Day of Judgement, then we can more properly understand what He means here in today’s parable.

➔ The “it” then refers to “the reign of God” or “the reign of heaven” in three inter-connected plains. First it is when God comes down to reign among His people in the person of His Son Jesus for the purpose of winning and bringing salvation to us through His sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection and victory over death. Second is when God continues to reign in and

¹ Matthew 21:1-28:20, Jeffrey Gibbs, CPH © 2018, pg.1331

² <https://www.salaryexpert.com/salary/area/united-states/colorado>

among His people through His Holy Spirit within the One Holy Christian Church while Jesus had ascended to prepare our eternal heavenly home. That's where we are at right now in God's timeline. And third is the "reign of heaven", as God has promised, when His Son, Jesus comes down again to "reign" or "rule as the almighty King"; to both renew His Creation and judge all souls for eternity on the Last Day.

- ✘ Today's parable addresses both the second and third parts of God's "reign of heaven", when Jesus says that the "reign of heaven" will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property" (v.14).

→ Only moments before, Jesus finished teaching through the parable of the ten virgins that we must live our lives here in His Church, while He is reigning within us through the Holy Spirit, as those who are always prepared and eagerly awaiting His coming at all times.

→ But the unanswered question that last Sunday's parable leaves us with is this, "What does it mean, or look like, to live our lives while we are awaiting Jesus' return so that we will always be prepared for that Day?"

II. The master and His servants.

- ✘ Well, both today's and next Sunday's Gospel Readings give us Jesus' answer to that question. Today, I'm calling it "The End-Time Life, Part 1", where Jesus teaches us the first thing to do as we wait for His return. Once we understand this proper perspective of the "reign of heaven", as I have just described it, this story is really quite simple and the message should be abundantly clear.

→ Though there are three servants in Jesus' parable, the first two really act as one. They apparently believe that as servants of this particular master, they have an important purpose, which is to serve Him faithfully in using his fortune entrusted to them in a manner consistent with his good name and seeking to increase his possessions. And as we see, when their master returned, they were, in fact, able to give him back twice what he had entrusted to them. Notice in fact that he views them equally because his response to each one is identical, "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" (vv. 21, 23). You see, the master's judgment is not based upon the amount entrusted or the amount returned; only that they had been "faithful" in their efforts and use of the master's fortune.

→ The third servant, however, stands out in the way that he speaks to his master. Though the master had entrusted him with a smaller amount, it was still a portion of the master's fortune. But this servant says he was "afraid" that he might lose what was entrusted, so he hid it away in order to "keep it safe." When his master returned, this servant gave the master the very same amount back that he had received. And the master's condemning words teach us a great deal about Jesus' intended lesson, "You wicked and [lazy] servant! ... You ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest" (vv. 26-27). So, it wasn't that this servant did "less" than the others. The problem is that he did nothing at all!

- Why? because he says that he "knew" the master to be a "hard" and unreasonable man. Yet the evidence from this master's dealing with the other two servants, does not ring true with this servant's words. In fact, the master's evaluation of the servant actually shows that he is quite fair. This servant was both "lazy" and "wicked". He did nothing to serve his master, even after the master had trusted him with a small fortune. Instead, it is the servant who is disrespectful toward and inaccurate in his evaluation of the master. Clearly he did not really "know" his master as he claimed.

- ✘ Though the master blessed the third man by including him as a part of his household, the servant rejected the master's trust and kindness through both his actions and his words.
 - ➔ So the master had no choice. He had to bring a judgment that was consistent with the truth. Verse 28, "So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents." And verse 30, "...cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." It was the man who showed that he was not really the master's servant after all, so the master removed him from that status of blessing and sent him out of the household where the servant's public identity would be consistent with his beliefs and actions.

III. Application of the parable to us today

- ✘ Though this parable is often understood and taught as a message that we should use all the gifts we've received from God – our intelligence, our skills and abilities, our relationships and our wealth – in a God-pleasing way, that's not really the point Jesus is getting at here.
 - ➔ After all, God gives those kinds of gifts to everyone, believers and unbelievers alike. Instead, in this parable Jesus addresses the very special treasure that God has given exclusively to His servants who are in His "household", the Church; those things He wants us to use for the building up and increase of His reign here on earth in order to grow the number of souls that will be with Him in eternity in heaven.
- ✘ And the most valuable of the riches that God entrusts to you and me is not any physical or intellectual or emotional blessing. It is the gift of a new life earned for us in Jesus' saving work in our place; a treasure that is solely rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ!
 - ➔ So, it should be obvious, but I must make sure we all understand; though Jesus' parable is merely an earthly story, it points us to consider a concrete, life-altering reality that all of us as Christian believers are to be about.
- ✘ The one and only true God has actually entrusted you, and you, and you...and me with a treasure worth far more than any lifetime fortune. And He has given us a great amount of freedom and latitude in how we will actually use it. These riches are very real. This is no fantasy.
 - ➔ Jesus actually died on the cross and paid for the sins of the whole world, including yours. He really rose from the grave, declaring that God has forgiven you all of your sins; that you too will rise forever to be in His eternal presence and glory.
 - ➔ You actually have new life in Jesus right now today. And He has given you the riches of His Gospel trust; not just as a temporary trust like the servants in the parable. No, God's riches are really yours, today and forever.
 - ➔ Every day you are blessed to be in your Master's joy as you realize for example that; this life you woke up to today is a new life in Jesus; that your sins have been washed entirely away in His baptismal flood; that your conscience is now freed from the burden of guilt; that you are wrapped every moment in the certainty of Jesus' unconditional love.
- ✘ And so there are three main points that we as our Master's servants need to take away and apply from this wonderful parable today.
 - ➔ First, do not forget who your Master truly is. He is the always-generous, loving, fair and perfect God and Creator of your soul. He constantly wants you as a part of His household of faith here on earth and forever in heaven. So, just because you may not always understand why things are as they are in this life, that fact never ever changes!

→ Second, do not forget who you are; the servant of a particular Master; brought into His family by grace through faith in His Son, who died for you, rose for you and now reigns in and through you every day.

→ And third, He has entrusted to you a life of relationships and opportunities and resources to use for Him in a manner that will share His love and truth with those who as of yet do not know Him, but souls that He desires to bring into His loving reign as well.

- So do not hide or bury God's precious gifts where they cannot be used for His saving purposes. His treasure comes to you with His power and with grace. So put it out there, wherever you are at "today" and watch God bring the increase according to His will.

Conclusion

⌘ And when Jesus, our Master returns, I imagine our conversation with Him will go something like this:

→ One servant approaches Jesus and says, "Lord, you entrusted these things to me and I have gained this much. ... But there is so much more that I could have done!" And the Master will reply, "Yes, I am well aware that there was more that you could have done. Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Master."

→ And a second servant then approaches the Master and says, "Lord, you entrusted this to me, and I have gained an additional amount. ... But I was timid too often. I failed to take advantage of all of the opportunities presented to me." And the Master will reply, "Yes, I recall every detail of all the times when you were a coward. Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Master."³

⌘ You see, in the end – at the end – it matters only that Christ is your Master who has purchased you as His beloved servant. May you and I then keep our eyes on the Master and His gracious reign in our lives every day until the Day of His final return. Amen.

³ Jeffrey Gibbs, pg.1338