

BE A GOOD STEWARD

9/11/2022 • MATTHEW 25:14-46

MAIN POINT

We must learn how to be good stewards of everything God has given us.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What was the last thing you saw kids in your life fight over? What similarities do you see between their feelings toward their toys and your feelings toward the things you have?

What intangible things has God given you? Which do you have the greatest struggle using for God?

What would you have to believe to be true about God in order to give your best to Him?

If we are to truly answer our calling as believers, we must recognize God's ownership of everything we have, and we must learn how to be good stewards of everything He has given us. The Parable of the Talents tells of servants who are given resources by their master, and how the way they invest their resources and lives affects their end reward.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 25:14-30.

As you read this with a new fresh eye, what stood out to this time as you read it?

Review how the first two were rewarded. Discuss the last servant's response, rational and the emotion that paralyzed him from being a good steward. He seemed to play out in his head a scenario that determined his actions. How often do we do this?

How does fear grip us from doing things God intends for us to do with Him?

What are you afraid of to invest in or do because of fear?

People who use their capacities, skills, and gifts grow in abilities and readiness for wider opportunities and responsibilities. Individuals who fail to use their resources see those capacities fade and disappear. Thus, when used, much becomes more; when unused, less becomes nothing. Believers do not lose salvation as punishment for failing to seize

opportunities; they lose the capacities necessary for meaningful, ever-expanding service for Christ. Jesus' parable teaches us that God wants us to invest and use the capacities He has given us. God rewarded the servants who were faithful with more. When God dealt with the servant who was not faithful he punished him and gave his talent to the faithful servant.

As Christians, we must make the most of God-given opportunities for kingdom service. Our doing so involves effort and risk in using what God has given us. He expects us to do only what He has equipped us to do. God will hold us accountable for failing to seize opportunities to serve. The way that we serve reflects what we believe about the end, and who is ultimately in control. This is evident in Jesus' second parable of Matthew 25 about sheep and goats.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 25:31-33.

What do “nations” and “thrones” make you think of? Why is this imagery important to the truth of these verses?

How would you explain the message of the sheep and goats in your own words?

This passage is intended to be part of the series that began in 24:42. It serves the same purpose as the preceding four parables—to motivate us toward obedience, in preparation for the future.

The terms nations and thrones bring up the idea of a king and his kingdom. It is critical to remember the ultimate authority of Jesus when confronted with His judgment. When He honors the sheep and rejects the goats, He does so with both the moral authority and absolute power that comes from sitting on the throne of the universe.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 25:34-40.

What did Jesus invite the sheep to do? What does it mean to inherit the kingdom?

What did Jesus say that the sheep did? How did the sheep respond to the King?

What word did the King use toward the sheep in verse 37? Why is righteous—being in right standing with God—such an important name to be called?

Jesus turned and spoke to the sheep. He told the sheep to come into the kingdom that was prepared for them from the foundation of the world. Before the world was created the kingdom was designed to go to these sheep. They had cared for the King by giving Him food, drink, and clothes. They welcomed Him and visited Him. The sheep did not know they had helped the King, they were just helping people in need.

HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 25:41-46.

What was the first thing Jesus said to the goats? Why were they condemned to eternal fire?

How are the sheep, the first group, and the goats, the second group, similar? How are they different?

Jesus turned to the goats and said, “Depart from me.” He called them “cursed” and sent them into “eternal fire.” They were condemned to hell. They were sent there because they had not done what the sheep did. Like the sheep they did not see the King in the needy, but unlike the sheep they did not help them.

How did Jesus summarize the parable? How does that strong conclusion impact the way that you see Jesus?

Why is meeting the physical needs of the hurting and helpless so important for the Christ-follower?

What did Jesus mean when He said, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me”?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What example did Jesus set for us when it comes to using the resources God gives? What type of sacrifice did this require on Jesus’ part?

How can you better invest the spiritual gifts, or “deposits,” God has given you?

How is it that by serving people, we love them and show them Jesus?

What are actions we can take to help those in need? How does the fact that you will be judged change the way you view your life? How does it change the way you look at others?

PRAYER

Close in prayer, asking God for the courage to be faithful stewards of His resources this week. Thank Him for His many blessings and gifts and pray that He will help each of you live with a fresh commitment to not waste a single opportunity He has given you.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 25:14-46

25:14-14. Jesus told His disciples a parable to emphasize the need for His followers to be ready for His return. Using the familiar life situation of a wealthy man’s going on an extended trip, Jesus drew parallels to His disciples’ responsibilities while they awaited His return. To ensure that his business was conducted as usual in his absence, the man distributed his wealth to his slaves to manage for him. He knew his slaves well, so he

entrusted money to each according to his own ability—five talents, two talents, and one talent, respectively.

25:16-18. A talent was a weight of precious metal, and the value of the owner's possessions was considerable. Having distributed his wealth, the owner departed. The slaves who received five talents and two talents immediately began to do business with the money entrusted to them and doubled their amounts. The slave who received one talent, however, buried the money for safekeeping.

In Jesus' story, the slaves' owner was gone a long time before he returned, called the three to him, and settled accounts with them. Their day of reckoning had arrived. The slave entrusted with five talents reported a 100% profit on his master's money. The owner was overjoyed, not merely because of the large monetary gain but also because of his slave's faithfulness. The slave had proved to be trustworthy by fulfilling his duty. He had discharged his responsibility over a few things, comparatively speaking (because five talents actually represented a lot of money). His reward was greater responsibility; the owner would place him in charge of many things. The slave would receive a greater assignment—a larger work to do. Also, the owner invited the faithful slave to share the master's joy.

25:22-23. The second slave reported that he also had doubled his master's money. Again, the master commended the slave's faithfulness, gave him wider responsibility, and invited him to share his master's joy.

25:24-28. The slave given one talent to manage approached and impudently described his master as a hard (harsh, stern, rough) man. The Greek word can convey the sense of a cruel and merciless person. Furthermore, the slave branded his master as unjust, reaping (and possibly winnowing) others' grain crops. The slave charged his master with exploiting others for gain. If the slave attempted to place the owner on the defensive or tried to shift the blame for his lack of action, he failed miserably. The master addressed the slave as "evil" because he slandered the master and sought to make excuses for his own failure. The Greek term rendered "lazy" conveys the sense of hesitancy or holding back. With dripping sarcasm, the master condemned the slave with the man's own words. The owner did not affirm the slave's characterization of him. His response indicated that if the slave regarded him as stern, exacting, and unjust and thus was afraid of him, the slave should have taken some action. He should have known his disobedience would incur the master's reprimand.

The third slave was not dishonest; he was disobedient. He did nothing wrong so much as he simply did nothing. The master did not have unreasonable expectations—if the slave merely had deposited the money with bankers so it would earn interest, the master would have been satisfied. But the slave failed to try, so the one talent was taken away and given to the first slave, who had doubled the money entrusted to him.

25:29-30. On the surface, verse 29 is puzzling and difficult. What is fair about a person with much getting more, and an individual with little losing that little? Actually, Jesus stated a law of life. People who use their capacities, skills, and gifts grow in abilities and readiness for wider opportunities and responsibilities. Individuals who fail to use their resources see those capacities fade and disappear. Thus, when used, much becomes more; when unused, less becomes nothing. Believers do not lose salvation as

punishment for failing to seize opportunities; they lose the capacities necessary for meaningful, ever-expanding service for Christ. Jesus' parable teaches us that God wants us to invest and use the capacities He has given us.

25:31. When the Son of Man comes in His glory points to the future and the closing era of God's plan of redemption. Jesus' return at some point in the future is often treated with slight embarrassment today by otherwise fine Christians. Their expectations have not been met even though the signs seem to line up again and again. The words glory, angels, and throne call attention to the majesty, power and authority of the second coming.

25:32. The word for nations can refer either to Gentiles only or to all people from every nation including Israel. The latter is to be preferred here. The emphasis is on all people as individuals, not on nations collectively. Each person will be judged based on his or her response to the Gospel and will receive Christ's verdict. Jesus will separate them one from another. This image of judgment gives rise to several important points. First, all of human life and effort boils down to a basic choice based on Jesus' message and sacrifice. A second important point we can take from the image in this parable concerns the sheep and the goats. Distinguishing between these two animals is difficult, especially from a distance, except for someone who knows precisely what to look for. A shepherd is qualified.

25:33. The positions of left and right indicate the complete distinction. There is no middle ground. The sheep have the position on the right, the place of honor. The goats are on the left, in this case the place of rejection.

25:34. The King emphasizes Jesus' dominion and power at the final judgment. His reign, which is no less real today, will be complete— all of creation will be forced to acknowledge His authority. Those on His right are invited to come. They will receive their reward for faithful service. Notice they are not about to be blessed but already are blessed by my Father. The word blessed emphasizes God's action in bringing people into His desired relationship with them. The fact of our relationship to God leads naturally to the next image in the parable. Inherit the kingdom underscores the Christian's place in God's family. The Scripture often uses the imagery of an "inheritance" to describe our inclusion in God's family and the reward we will enjoy.

25:35. The criteria for judgment is surprising, and a few preliminary words may help to understand the specific intent of the parable. Judgment is based on works in this parable, but this does not mean Jesus was describing salvation by works. He was emphasizing the importance of service, and service especially to the neediest people in our society. His strong language here does not negate the wider New Testament teaching of salvation by grace through faith. It simply highlights the results of salvation.

25:36. Naked may refer to someone without any clothes or someone who only has an undergarment. Ministry to the sick is always important. Only when you have benefited firsthand from this kind of kindness can you really appreciate its impact. In this context the people in prison may refer to those who fell on hard times through debt or were abused in some manner by the wealthy and influential. They were the weak and poor.

25:37-39. One of the most interesting features of this parable is the element of surprise on both sides. Our service to others must not be undertaken with the intention of piling up rewards. That kind of motivation undermines the genuineness of service.

25:40. Who are the least of these my brothers? Some interpreters suggest brothers refers to the disciples only, but such an understanding is far too narrow and in effect limits the application of the parable to the first century. A better understanding is the more obvious interpretation, that they are any person in need.

25:41. This passage essentially mirrors the previous section with a few more interesting details. The eternal fire is a detail of hell about which we can either make too much or too little. Some preachers over the years appear almost to take delight in describing their visions of hell.

25:42-43. The criteria for the rejection of the wicked is the opposite of the criteria for the inclusion of the righteous. Their sins are primarily those of omission.

25:44. You can almost hear in these words of defense, “but we never hurt anyone!” That is true, but the failure to show compassion reveals the state of one’s soul. A related plea of “if we had known it was you!” is equally unconvincing.

25:45. You did not do underscores the inaction of the cursed. Interestingly, their lack of service, as benign as that may sound to us, puts them in the same category as those who commit gross sins, reel drunkenly down the streets, or scream profanely. This verse highlights the danger of the “isolated moral person” who did nothing to harm anyone.

25:46. The opposite destinations underscore the finality of the verdict that is rendered at the judgment. Both are eternal.