

364 Days of Thanksgiving – Week 3

February 19, 2017

Matthew 25:14–30 (NIV11) - ¹⁴ “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’ ²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ ²² “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’ ²³ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ ²⁴ “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ ²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. ²⁸ “ ‘So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Introduction

Two weeks ago, we saw Jesus heal ten lepers as he began his last, long journey to Jerusalem. We saw Jesus’ **uncommon mercy, which led to uncommon gratitude** from one of the lepers. Last week, we followed Jesus into Jericho, his last stop before Jerusalem. In Jericho, Jesus stayed with Zacchaeus, a small man with a big heart, who showed us that **overwhelming gratitude leads to overwhelming generosity**.

Now, just a few days later, we find Jesus in Jerusalem, three days before his death on the cross. He’s in the temple, teaching the people for the last time. As usual, Jesus uses parables – earthly stories with heavenly meanings.

Today, as we conclude our sermon series on gratitude, we’re going to look more closely at one of those parables. And as we do, we’re going to see how **thankfulness leads to faithfulness**.

Sermon Exposition: Thankfulness Leads to Faithfulness

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus told us that the kingdom of heaven is like **“a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them.”** From the amount of money he gave his servants, it appears this was an exceptionally rich man. One translation of this lesson tells us that to the first servant he gave “five talents of money.”

It’s thought that a talent was about 75 pounds. Experts today aren’t sure exactly how much a talent of silver would be worth in today’s figures, but it would be a lot. One commentator estimated it would be around \$300,000. If that’s true, the rich man gave roughly \$1.5 million to the first servant to take care of. To the next, he gave about \$600,000. And finally, to the third, he gave \$300,000. Then he went away on his journey.

Immediately the servant who received the \$1.5 million put it to work. He invested it. He worked hard with it and doubled it to \$3 million. The second servant took his \$600,000 and also put it to work, doubling it to \$1.2 million. The third, however, took his 75 pounds of silver, his \$300,000; put it in a box; and buried it in the ground to keep it safe.

A long time went by. Finally, the master returned from his long journey and decided to settle accounts with his servants. The first servant came forward. He gave his master the whole \$3m and explained how he'd worked hard to double his master's money. **"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"**

The second servant came forward. He showed his master the \$1.2m he'd amassed. The master responded in exactly the same way. **"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"**

But then the third servant came forward. He dug up his \$300k and gave it to his master. He then proceeded to make excuses for not having earned anything more. He blamed the master. He said that he was worried that the master would get mad if he invested it and somehow lost it.

"You wicked, lazy servant!" the master replied. "You could have at least put the money in the bank and earned some interest for me!" With that, the master gave his \$300k to the first servant and threw the lazy servant out into the street.

So, what's the point of this parable? Well, the master of the story is obviously God; we're the servants. One of the first things we learn from this parable is that God doesn't give everyone the same gifts. To one servant the master gave five talents; to another, two talents; and to another, one talent.

Did you ever get frustrated because things didn't always seem so fair? Maybe you desperately wanted to be good at a sport. You practiced so hard to improve your skills, but there were always players who were better than you were. No matter how hard you worked, you could never be as good as they were.

There are people out there who seem to be born with silver spoons in their mouths. It seems like they have everything handed to them on a platter. There are people out there who are more naturally gifted than you or me. There are people out there who don't work as hard as we do and yet have better jobs, bigger homes, and more money.

But before we whine and complain about how unfair that is, remember that even though God gives different gifts to different people, he blesses all of us with more than we deserve. Even the servant who only got one talent still received a lot – \$300k is nothing to sneeze at. Instead of comparing ourselves with those who have more than we do – instead of focusing on what we don't have – let's remember what we do have.

Look at all the wonderful blessings God has entrusted to your care—a home and furniture, cars and TVs, cell phones, riding lawn mowers, your children and grandchildren, your spouse, your friends, your body, your church. That's nothing to sneeze at.

They all belong to God, and yet he's entrusted those amazing treasures to you and to me. He asks us to take care of them, and the only thing he expects from us is faithfulness.

The first servant earned five talents. The second earned only two. Yet God didn't say to the second guy, "Why didn't you earn as much as that first guy?" No, he told him, "**Well done, good and faithful servant!**" Even though he didn't earn as much as the first servant, he did his best with what God had given him.

That's what God wants from you and me—that we recognize what he's entrusted to us and that we use those gifts to the best of our abilities. Yet we don't always do that so well, do we? Like the third servant, we're often lazy. We like to make excuses. Maybe because we can't be the best, we don't do the best. We just give up.

Think about in our lives how often we don't do our best. Think about how, as parents, we sit our children in front of the TV to watch videos because we're too tired to play or spend time with them. Think about all the time we waste at our jobs, standing around talking, working at only half speed. Think about school. How often do you actually study as hard as you can? How much do you really pay attention in class? Or think about our church. How often don't we stay in bed on Sunday morning and worship at "St. Pillow," rather than come to St. John? No, we usually don't give God our best. We tend to make excuses like that third servant.

Thankfully our God gave his best for us. Even when you're not faithful, God is faithful and will forgive you. God forgives your wastefulness. God forgives your pride. He forgives you for thinking that you've earned what you have. God forgives your laziness and excuses. It's all been washed away forever through Jesus. God isn't going to punish you. He's not going to throw you out into the darkness where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth. When your time comes, your Savior-God is going to throw open the gates to heaven and say, "**Well done, good and faithful servant! . . . Come and share your master's happiness!**"

Isn't that amazing? Even though you're unfaithful in so many ways, God's still going to say to you, "**Well done, good and faithful servant!**" He's going to say that because, when he looks at you, he doesn't see your failings and faithlessness – he only sees how Jesus faithfully served, how Jesus faithfully lived, how Jesus faithfully died in your place.

But now, seeing Jesus' faithfulness to you, respond by thankfully and faithfully serving him. Do your best in school. God doesn't expect you to be the best in your class. He expects you to do your best. Don't lower your standards. Don't accept mediocrity. Study hard. Use the brain God's given you.

Do your best at your job. Whether you're the supervisor or the lowest on the totem pole, whether you're managing a corporation or managing activities at your home, whether you care for newborn infants as a nurse or babysit a three-year-old to earn a little money, faithfully give God your best. If your job is cleaning the grills at McDonald's, show God how much you love him by making them the cleanest grills around. Don't settle for less than your best. Be the best mother and wife you can be. Be the best husband and father you can be. Be the best friend you can be. God doesn't expect you to be *the* best at anything. All he wants is for you to faithfully do *your* best.

For the last three weeks, we've talked about what it means to be thankful. In the end, being thankful is the secret – the secret to happiness, the secret to true, godly success. See what God has done for you. Recognize all that he's given you. See Jesus. See his forgiveness and love. See the heaven that's waiting for you. Look at your children and spouse. Look at your friends and relatives. Look at your homes and cars and clothes. Look at your church family. God's been so good to you! Give him thanks. Be faithful with all he's entrusted to you. Amen.