

November 17, 2019 The Lord's Expectations Matthew
25:14-30

It all started with the disciples being impressed by the great buildings in Jerusalem. One of the things we seldom talk about is this. Herod was a master builder. At Caesarea Maritime, on the shores of the Mediterranean sea, the ruins of his theater not only can still be seen, there are times of the year when classic Greek drama unfolds at that venue. You can walk the race track where charioteers competed in the times of Jesus. Well, for Jews Jerusalem was as it is today, "the great city". The ruins of the Temple complex are impressive. And the disciples were impressed.

The first verse of Matthew 24 makes this point: "Jesus left the Temple and was walking away when HIS disciples came up to HIM to call HIS attention to its buildings." Like tourists from Belleville, Peter, Andrew, James and John were impressed. Jesus started talking about the future, specifically about the destruction of the Temple. That led to their request that Jesus tell them more about the end time, and Jesus second coming. Jesus told them a number of parables in response to that request. It led to this parable which begins at verse 14 of Matthew 25.... "It will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants together, and entrusted his property to them."

Jesus second coming: it is tempting to think it won't happen in our time. We are tempted as a result of that

thought to put it out of mind. It is tempting to think we won't have to deal with it. On the other hand I make the observation that many are tempted, given that Jesus said so much about the signs of the times, and the signs of the end of the age, to conclude that we can figure out the time-table if we are just attentive enough to what the Bible has to say on the matter....even though the Scripture clearly tells us Jesus said... "No man knows the time or the hour." And this is one of those sentences in which the word man, does not indicate gender. Sorry ladies, but you won't figure this one out either. It is also tempting to think that all we have to do is watch and wait. Be observant. Practice faithful patience. What did the Beatles sing, "Let it be?"

One of the lessons of the parable we call, the Parable of the Talents, is that Jesus expects us to watch and wait, but not to be idle. He expects us to be diligent. He expects us to have a lot to do and sometimes to feel like there is too much to do and too little time to do it in. This parable teaches us that our abilities, our gifts, our skills, are not our own, and they have not been given to us that we might simply enjoy them. His grace toward us in skills, talents, and spiritual gifts all have to do with an expectation that we will busy, that the work load will be heavy. He expects us to work, to work for HIM and in HIS name. And HE expects us to be able to show demonstrable results.

Here are some of the specific lessons Jesus teaches us about HIS second coming. Never doubt, the Lord has entrusted us with HIS treasure. The treasure of faith and all its implications is HIS property. And HE has left it in our hands. What we are about as the Church of Jesus Christ is not building our own programmes, or running one local business, and we must not think of it as our own..."my church"

It is also very apparent from the attitude of the man who went on a journey, who went away, that he never for a moment considered it acceptable that his servants might think there was nothing they could do that would profit HIM, or bring glory to HIS name. He praises those who have labored to increase HIS holdings, to multiply HIS influence on the world in which they have been living and laboring. The only servant with which HE was displeased was the one who took what he had been given, buried it in the ground, and kept it safe so that it could be returned to HIS master in tact. To that servant there is dismissal. To him there is disapproval. His small holding of property in trust, is taken from him because he cannot be trusted with it and it is given to those who have demonstrated they could work long hours. Take risks. Increase the Master's influence in and throughout the world.

This parable teaches us that our Master expects us to understand what HIS business is: building the Kingdom of God on earth, "like it is in heaven." HE expects us to understand and HE expects us to produce results. He expects our hands to

be calloused from laboring for the kingdom. He expects our arms to bear the bruises and the scars that come of having loved people who took advantage and perhaps were even abusive in return. HE expects to be able to see that we have given blood, sweat and tears to the business.

And HE expects us to have taken risks. The misguided fellow who knew the Master could be a hard man, who kept the property entrusted to him safe, but did not run the risks of investment, or schemes and plans that bore little or no fruit is the one who finds himself in hot water. In fact he loses the little he had , for not being willing to take risks in order to gain his Master an increase.

If Jesus Kingdom has a business plan, this parable would seem to suggest it goes something like this: accomplish things that please Jesus. That show HIM our labours have profited...not us....but HIM. He apparently expects HIS priorities to be met, while HE is out of this world, having left us in charge of the company, the property, the kingdom. It seems that taking risks equates with exercising faith. Those who increased their Masters holdings were the ones who were faithful. The one who kept HIS Master's property, or treasure safe, by doing nothing with it, is the one who is unfaithful. And notice this because this is really troubling, those who have no faith at all just are not part of this final picture, after the Master returns. Returning to the one who was given only a little bit of

the Master's treasure, his sin is this: he did not use the resources he had clearly been given.

Here are some conclusions I have drawn from the parable of the talents. First of all this parable and a number of parables that surround it during this walk among the beautiful buildings that make up and surround the Temple in Jerusalem, teach that the second coming will be a surprise when it occurs. You can prepare for it. You can plan for it. But it is never going to happen according to some plan we have worked out. Anyone who claims to know the time or the season is barking up the wrong tree. That is not going to be how it works out.

That leads to this conclusion. The exercise of faith in Jesus, faith in God, faith in the Holy Spirit is an exercise of working when it often feels we are on our own, alone, unsupervised. In other words, we work in circumstances where we are surrounded by the temptation to think there is no urgency to get the work done. We are tempted to think we will not be asked to account for what we did and when we did it and with whom, and above all why. And of course this is the most obvious thing that comes out of the Parable of the Talents: working in the Lord's name, working for God = using the abilities, the times, the circumstances we have been given to work with. There is no reason at all to worry about what Henry is doing in the next field or what we might have done in a field where gold could be found.

We all have talent. We all have a measure of strength. We all have imaginations. We all have skill unique to us and our experience. And we have all been touched in some measure by Jesus. According to this parable that is all we need and we have been given enough.

Shortly we will be turning our attention to the celebration of Christmas. We are all going to be short of time, tired and stressed. Let's remember who it is gave us the time and the season. Let us seek to increase the influence of Jesus in a battered, bitter and often cruel world. May we not only taste the joy but share it generously.

Let us pray

Lord help us. Help us to touch the lives of others with your love. Help us to live as those who await your return. Lord help us to find ways of serving others instead of wanting to be served. Help us not to turn thumbs down on opportunities that appear to be risky. Fill our hearts with unexplainable joy, and miraculous peace, and may we love others as YOU have loved us. Amen