



Sermon Notes: Greg Burke,

17 March 2024

“Be Faithful and Wise”

Readings: Matthew 25: 14-30, Proverbs 2:1-8, Colossians 4:2-9

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The Stradivari Society entrusts top-flight violins made by seventeenth and eighteenth century master builders into the hands of young, world class violin players, who could never hope to pay the millions of dollars that the instruments cost. The instruments are owned by rich patrons who know that a fine musical instrument was made to be played, not locked away in a vault. If they are not played regularly, they lose their tone - the more they are played the more they gain in value. The owners of these beautiful instruments look for world class players to use them, preserve and care for them.

Each musician is required to give at least two performances a year for the owner of the violin.

These violin players are stewards of their violins. They don't own them but are entrusted with these beautiful instruments by their owners. Their responsibility is to care for the violins and use them as if they were their own. And twice each year they are called into the presence of the owner of their instrument to give a musical account of their stewardship.

You are I are like those violin players. We are stewards of all that God has given us. Everything we are and everything we have has been entrusted to us by God and we are responsible to God for our stewardship.

Jesus tells a story about three people who are entrusted with their master's property to help us to understand our responsibilities as we make our day-to-day life choices before he returns.

For the follower of Jesus, it is never business as usual, because we are stewards of our **Master's** business.

Let's take a look at the story. Jesus begins in Matthew chapter 25, verse 14

***“Again, it will be like ...”***

What will be like? In the previous chapter Jesus has been teaching his disciples about his return to judge the living and the dead. His return in righteousness to renew creation - so that the whole universe will bring glory to its creator, and every person will bow before Jesus, God's king. This is the consummation of the kingdom. The day when the surprising power and hidden potential of the Kingdom of God will be clear for all to see.

***“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them.”***

They know their job is to manage the affairs and the resources of their master on his behalf and for his benefit.

To one he gives five bags of gold (literally 5 talents - a talent is a weight of gold equal to about 20 years wages. In our day - about \$1.6m) to another two bags of gold, and to the third servant - 1 bag of Gold. \$8m, \$3m and \$1.5m.

This is a very rich man - and a man who trusts his servants with great responsibility.

What would you do if your boss gave you \$8m of his personal money to manage for him??

Like all good bosses this master knows the potential and capabilities of his employees. He gives to each servant according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

What do these servants do?

The one with \$8 million went at once and put the money to work. He used it to start new business ventures - and due to his diligent hard work and good management he made \$8 million more for his master.

The servant with \$3 million does the same - and he also doubles his master's money.

The servant with \$1 million does something very different. He takes the money, digs a hole and buries it - he hides his master's money to keep it safe.

So there you have it.

Three different people given different but appropriate responsibility as stewards.

This story is about Jesus' **delayed** return. And it highlights the responsibility of every disciple of Jesus - God has entrusted us with all that we are and all that we have. Our money - of course, our abilities, our intellect - even our time (even our down time, our 'me 'time.) We each decide how we will use these things as we wait for Jesus to return.

Sure - some of us have more responsibility than others. More money, more natural gifts and abilities, more time - and others have less. Some of us are entrusted with 2 bags of gold, some 5 and some 1. The point is - what will we do with what God has entrusted to us?

We are all stewards i.e. we all are given real responsibilities by God and we all recognise that we have an obligation to God.

With all stewardship there comes a time to give an account. Here in Jesus' story, the master returns **after a long time** and settles accounts with his servants. Each servant in turn presents himself to his master. The man who had received five bags of gold says

***"Master, you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more."***

You can imagine a cart full of bags of gold, overflowing, shining in the sun and open for the master's inspection.

His master replied,

***"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; (the immense wealth of the master is obvious if he regards \$8m as small change), I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"***

Note that along with his master's commendation as a good and faithful servant, this man receives more responsibility. That would caution us against thinking about life in the age to come as sitting around on a damp cloud with nothing to do except play a dismal harp. The picture here is one of continued work and increased responsibility when Jesus returns.

Note also the reward is personal and relational - the good and faithful servant is invited in to share his master's happiness - his joy.

Working as stewards of Jesus is a joyful, happy and fulfilling experience. So next time I find myself grumbling at what God seems to require of me I am going to remind myself of the joy I will find in his service in the age to come. Then I will try to embrace my responsibilities here as preparation and training.

I love that phrase in the Anglican Prayer Book that says: **"God's service is perfect freedom."**

I just need to work a bit harder to take it on board.

The parable continues with the 2 bag servant presenting his profits to the master and his commendation is identical to the first servant. Faithfulness in discharging our responsibilities is what counts - not the amount we are entrusted with.

But the third servant - he has a very different story. Has he been standing in the shadows and overheard the interactions with the first two servants? We don't know. BUT **we** have - we have

watched and heard the settling of their accounts. Jesus is asking us to search our lives to see if we are good and faithful servants - have we exercised our stewardship in a trustworthy manner?

The man who had received one talent comes to give an account of his stewardship.

***“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. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.”***

Does his assessment of the master ring true? **Is** he a harsh and hard man? He doesn't seem like it. He seems generous in his praise and his rewards. He seems to delight in sharing his happiness. But of course, like any master he does have the right to expect a reasonable return on his money. He expects his servants to exercise their stewardship faithfully - and when they do he rewards them.

Harsh? Hard? Unreasonable? NO. Sadly, that is how some Christians see God.

Some resent the fact that God entrusts them with only one talent. Others reject any idea of stewardship - they see themselves as independent, self-made people who do not have to give an account to God. My bank balance, my house, my investments, my time - all these things are my own. I worked for them and earned them. I will do what I want with what I have. I will give God a small token donation occasionally. But I answer to myself - not to God. God has no right to demand anything of me. These people are much like the unbelievers they work and play with. They are theoretical believers, but practical atheists. Their Christian “faith” if we can use that term, makes hardly any difference to how they spend their money or use their time or employ their abilities. They reject any idea of stewardship entirely.

If they do think of giving an account to Jesus when he returns it will be a kind of spiritual account. They think he will ask them something about their beliefs and they have their answer ready. “Yes, I believed”. But of course, the accounting will be much more profound than that. We will each be called to give an account for how we **lived**. For our practical day to day lifestyle decisions that are a much better indicator of our actual faith.

***“Where our treasure is, there our heart will be also”*** Jesus says.

So what about this third servant? He said he buried the money because he was afraid of his master. He was not willing to take any risk. Perhaps what he says is half true. Perhaps he has that cringing fear of his master that some people have of God. But that is only part of the story. His master makes another judgement altogether.

See it in verse 26 - ***“You wicked and lazy servant”***.

It seems that underneath his excuse there is just plain laziness. He can't be bothered going to the trouble of working on his master's behalf. The master points out a giant hole in his excuse - If he really thought his master was a hard man expecting a return on his money, he would at least have deposited it with bankers and gained interest. This lazy servant did not love his master. He didn't have his master's interests at heart.

He is a wicked and lazy servant - not a good and faithful servant.

Notice how the opposite of faithful is lazy.

Again we remember James' words- **a faith without works - lazy faith - is dead.**

The day of accounting is the day of judgment. The bag of gold entrusted to the third servant is taken from him. And as the two faithful stewards walk off the stage with their master to share his happiness, the lazy servant is thrown out into the darkness - to the place of suffering - marked by weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus tells this story so that we will ask ourselves “What kind of stewardship am I exercising?” Are we faithful stewards willingly working and using everything we have and everything we are, joyfully in the service of Jesus?

As the hymn says; do we serve him with mirth? - do we take joyful pleasure in discharging the responsibilities he gives us?

Or are we fearful and resentful? Holding back and making excuses, never taking a risk in his service. Cringing as we bury our bag of gold rather than employing it in the service of Jesus who has entrusted it to us.

Are we just lazy? - happy to sit back and let others do the heavy lifting? The life of faith is a life of stewardship - a life of service.

Each one of us has received everything we have from God. We are the recipients of Grace.

And each one of us will be called upon to give an account of our stewardship. Jesus says the life of faith is lived between grace and judgment (an accounting).

Do you want to serve well? Here are two “take home” lessons from this parable:

To serve Jesus our master well we need to:

1. **Know our master** - our view of God, that is OUR THEOLOGY, determines our practical response - if we think God is harsh, demanding, overbearing then we will resent the demands of stewardship and discipleship.  
**So we must know the gracious, generous, righteous character of Jesus.**  
Immerse yourself in the Gospel biographies of Jesus and use this knowledge as a guide as you exercise your stewardship. Take risks for him, he wants us to be salt and light - he doesn't want us to lose our distinctive saltiness. He wants us to put our light on a stand to give light to the house - not hide it under a cover.
2. **Know ourselves** - your abilities, your resources, your age, your health, your education, your life stage, your experiences - these things change as each year goes by. God has entrusted these to you. See them as opportunities to serve, not limitations.

The first principle of a surgeon is “Do no harm” as she treats you. But of course, that is not enough. You go to a surgeon for positive intervention. You want her to do you good - to promote active healing.

The third servant in Jesus' parable may have done no harm. But that is not enough for the steward entrusted with God's resources.

As faithful stewards we long to hear those words:

***“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!”***

Until that day, the opening verse of Martin Luther's hymn would make a great motto and vision statement over each day of our lives:

***“All people that on earth do dwell,  
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.  
Him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell;  
come ye before him and rejoice.”***

Amen