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While We Are Waiting...: Live Responsibly

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TEXT: Matthew 25:14-30 (ESV)

“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘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.’ And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘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.’ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

Dear friends,

Dr. George Sweeting, former president of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, tells of the day he noticed an unusual combination of bumper stickers on the car of a man who was visiting the school. The coincidental message conveyed by the two bumper stickers prompted Dr. Sweeting to suggest to this unsuspecting visitor that he might want to remove one of them. You see one of them read, "Jesus is coming," and the other, "Escape to Wisconsin."

Jesus is coming again, you know. How do we know that? Because He said so. He said He would come again in power and glory at an hour we do not know, like a thief in the night, and take us to Himself. And we learn from Him and Matthew 25 that it matters how His followers conduct themselves while waiting for His return in power and glory. He outlines how His followers are to use their God-given days well, until He comes again or we breathe our final breath in this world. Last week in the parable of The Ten Bridesmaids, for instance, He taught the believers to live expectantly. The bridegroom may be delayed, but the believer in Christ must always be properly prepared for his arrival.

And in today's parable of the Three Servants and the talents, He teaches another important and valuable lesson. Three servants who work for a very wealthy master were entrusted with his property. One was given five talents and other two talents, and the third one talent than the master went away on a journey. I read somewhere that wealthy landowners back then usually did delegate the control and multiplication of their wealth to trained accountants who could either be free persons or as here, servants. And what this master delegated to his servant was a lot of money. You see, a talent was a huge monetary weight, a way of exchange. One talent actually equaled ten thousand denarii in those days, and a denarius equaled a whole day's wages. So we're talking some big money here. The first two promptly went out and went to work trading with what they had been given and they doubled their money. The third went buried his in the ground, played it safe, did nothing with it. He just sat on it and waited for the master to return. Well, the day arrived when the master did return to settle accounts. The first two reported in and to each of them his response was, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a little, I will set you over much.

Enter into the joy of your master.” They received accolades and promotions and they entered into the joy of their master. Now Jesus could well have used the Aramaic word for joy, which means “festival.” So in other words, the master threw a feast for them and honored them.

Now, the one talent servant came forward and said some not so nice things about the master. “Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you do not sew, gathering where you scattered no seed. So I was afraid – I hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.” The phrase “you have what is yours” was oftentimes used in Jewish transactions to say, “I’m not responsible for this any further.” The third servant should have known better. His words and his actions show that he simply did not care about the master or his property. He had a rather low opinion of the master and was afraid of him. He didn't do any work, take any risks with what he'd been given. He played it safe, looked out for himself. He just sat and waited for the master. And the master's not happy with this, is he? He reprimands the guy, calling him a wicked and slothful servant. Now notice he doesn't disagree with the servant's assessment of his master's character, but he does say, “You are supposed to do something with it. You could have at least invested it with the bankers. And in my coming, I could have received what was my own, along with some interest.” This servant shirked his responsibility. So the master had the one talent taken from him, given to the ten talents servant. Then this one-talent servant was cast into the outer darkness and labeled by his master as worthless.

Since we're looking at a story about finances, it seems appropriate to ask: “What's the bottom line of this parable?” First, let me point out how not to interpret it. Don't turn it into some sort of an allegory, making the master Jesus. Scripture does not allow us to do this. The master can't be a picture of Jesus because he's anything but a hard master, reaping what He has not sewn. For instance, he's the one who says, “Come to me, laborer and ye heavy laden, and I'll give you a rest.” The bottom line of the story simply this (the big idea): believers in Jesus, waiting for His return, are to live responsibly, giving all that they've got for God's cause, with everything God has given them. As biblical commentator Craig Keener puts it: “In view of the impending day of reckoning, believers must make the wisest use of all that the Lord is entrusted to them to make it count for Him. They must never take their stewardship for granted.”

Now, I've heard some people sum this parable up with the phrase "use it or lose it," and I suppose that works, but I suggest to you that it's really saying "use it and be willing to lose it for the sake of Jesus and the gospel." Because remember, Jesus said earlier to his disciples, "For he who would save his life, will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake, will save it." Followers of Jesus are to emulate Him who gave all that He had to carry out His father's plan. You see, Jesus left the glories of Heaven and entered our broken world to rescue the lost. He gave His all, He totally emptied Himself, giving everything for the sake of bringing lost people like myself and yourself who are far from God into His kingdom. Jesus gave His all in all to save us.

By the way, Jesus is not teaching in this parable that a person is saved by his or her good works. No, no, no, no. We are only saved by grace, through faith in Christ. Scripture is clear on that. But we must always keep in mind this important truth: God's grace is opposed to merit, but it is not opposed to effort. So followers of Jesus Christ live the rest of their days responsible for Him, giving their all with all God has given them – as a response to all He's done for them.

Now, before I go any further, I would be remiss if I did not ask this personal question: are you a follower of Jesus, a recipient of His saving grace? Jesus, then, is waiting on you. He's knocking on the door, wanting to come into your life and give you eternal life with Him. It begins right now and extends into eternity. Don't keep Him waiting. I appeal to you today, ask Him to come in and take over your life and be your savior and Lord.

Now, once you've become a follower of Jesus, the rest of life is living in response to His love and grace. We wait for His return, living expectantly and living responsibly, giving our all for Him with all God's given us. And each of us has been entrusted with so much from God. It's to be used responsibly for Him, for the kingdom, using our lives and all we have to bring to Christ those who are outside of a relationship with Jesus and with God. We give it all we've got, you see, to fulfill the great commission of making disciples of all nations. This is a truth for the church to keep in mind as we wait for Jesus to return. For instance, as the corporate church, our commission is not to pay off buildings, to live comfortably, just taking care of our own. Our commission is to make disciples of all people, to do all we can with what we have to seek and save the lost who need Christ Jesus in their lives. We've been given the great responsibility to do everything we can with everything we've got to add to the population of God's

kingdom. Let us not forget that. And as individual believers, we are responsible to use what we've been given ourselves for Christ, not for ourselves; to be good managers of what God has entrusted to us. I don't remember who said this statement, but I believe it's true: "The world asks, 'What does a man own?' Christ asks, 'How does he use it?'" [Andrew Murray].

Now, I know I'm going to make some people uncomfortable with these next questions, but I guess Jesus didn't call his followers to be comfortable, but faithful and fruitful. So here we go. Hang on now. How are you using the resources God has given to you? Are you making generous investments in his kingdom? For instance, let's use money as an example. Does your financial portfolio reflect a heart for the gospel and bringing others to Jesus? What story does your checkbook or credit card statement tell? Is the cause of Christ better off because you've been blessed with much? How much are you giving away to help others know and trust in the One who gave Himself to rescue us all? Some of us, you see, get the mistaken notion that all we have is ours, we've earned it. But the truth is, according to scripture, everything we have is from God alone. Like in the parable, it's entrusted to us from God to manage.

I heard a humorous story of a woman who had finished shopping and returned to her car, she found four men inside the car. She dropped her shopping bags and drew a handgun out of her purse and screamed, "I have a gun and I know how to use it! Get out of the car." Those men did not wait for a second invitation. They got out and ran away like crazy. The woman, somewhat shaken, loaded to her grocery bags and got into the car. But no matter how hard she tried, she could not get her key into the ignition. And then it dawned on her... her car was parked four or five spaces away. She loaded her grocery bags into her own car and then drove to the police station to turn herself in. The desk sergeant, to whom she told the story, nearly fell off the chair, laughing. He pointed to the other end of the counter where four men were reporting a carjacking by an old lady with thick glasses and curly white hair, less than five feet tall and carrying a handgun. No charges were filed. You see, she thought it was her car, but it really belonged to someone else.

Let's not fall into the trap of thinking our lives and what we have are our own. They really belong to God. In September I read an uplifting story in the news entitled *Billionaire Achieves Goal of Giving Away His Fortune*. That billionaire's name is Chuck Feeney, and he spent the last thirty-eight years giving away eight billion dollars to

charities around the world. Feeney says it's been fun and a great joy to help people now with what he has by giving. That's quite an inspiring goal, isn't it?

Living responsibly involves communicating to others in our network the story of what God in Christ has done for the world to share the gospel. While it's true that not every follower may be called to be an evangelist like Billy Graham, it's also true that every Jesus follower is called to be a witness where God has placed them, using the time and knowledge and God-given abilities and resources to bring the good news story of salvation to other people. It's not to be kept to ourselves. And He's giving you an ability to learn the story and to communicate it to others. He gives every believer the power of His Holy Spirit to make us effective in our witnessing endeavors. He's surrounded us with a mission field – friends and family and co-workers and fellow students and acquaintances that he loves and wants in His kingdom. He's given us ears to listen closely.

It's been suggested that in the description of the third servant, Jesus could have had in mind the religious establishment of Israel who kept the gift of God's word to themselves. They had set aside the notion that they were chosen by God to be the light to the nations. They were blessed by God to be a blessing to the families of the Earth. But instead of reaching out to lost people, or out of fear of tainting themselves, they kept God's goodness and grace to themselves and just wrote the others off. They kept themselves separated from these unclean sinners of the world. They didn't care about others. They believed it was all about me and God, and to hell with the rest of the world. A tragic story.

Now, instead of just judging them, let's learn from them and keep a check on our own attitude. It's just as easy today to fall prey to that kind of thinking and to hide the gospel and keep it to ourselves for fear of failure or losing a friend or a family member or being ridiculed or identified with the unsavory. It's tempting to play it safe and stay silent with people that God really wants to have a relationship with. Now, I know I'm not just talking to you, but also myself. I really do love this old saying: "A ship in harbor is safe, but it is not what ships are for." So also a silent Christian is safe, but that is not what Christians are for.

So living responsibly means telling the story; also letting your light shine so that others see your good works and give glory to your Father in Heaven. We shine for him when

we walk in His footsteps, living for righteousness, doing good to those around us in His name, and feeding the poor and showing mercy and kindness in the name of Christ.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, (and I do hope you are), Jesus is coming again soon. And very soon we're going to see the King. We don't know when. He will reappear in power and glory, it will be a glorious day, we know that, in which we will rejoice in live in His presence forever. No more tears, no more sorrow, no more suffering, and no more death. But while we were waiting, Jesus is counting on us to live responsibly for Him. And that's the bottom line of the teaching for today.

Amen.