Written in Red: “Well Done!”
Matthew 25:14-30
February 17, 2013

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,[a] 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.’

Matthew places this parable in a section of lessons about the end of things
after Jesus’ final entry into Jerusalem.
Jesus is staring at His own departure from those He has been teaching and
training. He is about to leave all of His accomplishments in the hands of multiple
believers. He tells three parables about watchfulness in Matthew 24. Servants should
watch during the master’s absence. Not just to be prepared and to perform duties,
but to improve the “talents” till his return.

2. Two Servants. “It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.” Don’t put off the responsibilities of service till later. Matthew 24:45-51.

3. Ten virgins. Wise young women were prepared for a delayed arrival of the groom. They have an extra supply of oil. Both wise and foolish groups want to meet the groom. Only some have prepared and panned for it. If you really want to see the groom, if you really want to be at the wedding, wouldn’t you make plans for it? Be prepared! Keep watching! Matthew 25:1-13.

The other parables urged the listeners to be constantly ready, in a perpetual state of expectancy for the return. This parable emphasizes the need for diligence in our present work and service.

Verses 14-15. Servants, slave, or attendant. The word should describe someone who gives himself wholly over to another’s will. The master has three servants he will be entrusting with a ton of his personal financial assets. The sums are HUGE—100 years of wages, 40 years of wages, and 20 years of wages. Something like 1.5 million dollars, 600,000 dollars, and 300,000 dollars.

He gives his resources to each slave according to their innate ability, strength, and power. Capacity seems important. Each one was given responsibilities according to their capacity. As they are his servants, he has been watching them for some time. He knows their limitations and strengths. For some there is a lot; for others, a little less. But there is an expectation that each will develop a return on investment.

Verses 16-18. The master leaves and the servants resume their responsibilities in their own ways. As soon as the master had gone, the first two went to work immediately. They put the money to work, making gains by investing, trading, and doing business. They are shrewd and are accustomed to making more out of what they have been given. They don’t delay in their labors. As soon as the master rides away, they are working to create more for the master.

The third servant does nothing. He buries the bag of gold and does whatever he wants while the master is away. Why is that? If the money had been his, he could do as he wanted, but they aren’t. The master supplied these resources for the sole purpose of getting a return. The first two servants understand the provenance of the providence.

Why doesn’t he act? Perhaps he is jealous that the others got more. He sees that he won’t get as much as the others, so why bother? Why does he do nothing? He says that the master is hard. Perhaps his view is, “There’s no way to make you happy. Nothing would have been good enough. Why should I even try?”

Verse 19. The master returns. Without expectation, without warning, the master arrives home and is ready to settle accounts. He is anxious to see what has
been done in his absence with his resources by his servants. One by one, they appear before him.

Verses 20 and 21 describe the exchange between the master and the first servant. He was the one given the most resources because he had the most capacity. Through his hard work, through his motivation, through his skill, he doubled the master’s money. Master, here is a one hundred percent return on investment. The master is elated and responds sort of like Sir Topham Hatt from the Thomas the Train series, “You are a very useful servant! Good job! Kudos! Attaboy! Job well done!” Not only was the work well done, but the servant’s value is highlighted. Good, honorable, excellent, useful, beneficial. “I love having you here!” There is promise of promotion, reward, and blessing.

Verses 22-23 are virtually identical. The second servant given two bags of money reports to the master. He, too, has made a one hundred percent return on the master’s faith-filled investment. He, too, is praised by the master. “You are such a benefit to me! You are so faithful. I knew I could rely on you. I’m giving you what you deserve.” Again there is promise of promotion, reward, and blessing.

Verses 24-25. At last the third servant appears before the master with a dirty money bag behind his back. As soon as he opens his mouth, he starts to make excuses, and not really in a way that makes much sense. “You’re so harsh. You’re so demanding. You ask the impossible. I didn’t do anything with this. Here is every last penny you gave me.” It would seem a better approach to butter up the boss, but this servant goes negative and puts his failure back on the master.

Verses 26-30. The master responds in anger. “If I am so difficult, if I am so threatening, if I am so scary, then why didn’t you do anything?!!??!” His assessment of this last servant is completely scathing. He is rotten to the core, and probably always has been. But not only is this man bad in nature and bad in ethics, he is also lazy. Sluggish, slothful, backward, and reluctant. He is “worthless,” and good for nothing. He is judged without any redeeming qualities whatsoever. He is weak and fearful and unwilling to act on his master’s behalf. His punishment for playing it safe and doing nothing? Everything he has is taken away, and he is removed from service and will never see the good graces of his master again. The rest of his existence will be miserable.

What should we take away from this story?

GOOD SERVANTS STAY ALERT.

The NIV notes say that the main point of the parable is being ready for Christ’s coming. Jesus tells a similar story in Mark 13:32-37.

32 “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. 34 It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

35 “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster
crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Being ready is not just about sitting on the porch watching for Him to return and then flying into action like some 12-year-old with a list of chores while his parents are away for a few hours. Every believer must be ready constantly for His return. Don’t be caught sleeping at your post. Watchfulness must mark all Jesus’ disciples. Being watchful doesn’t mean laziness and passivity; it calls you to duty, to development of what’s been given.

GOOD SERVANTS HONOR THE MASTER.

“Everything comes from God, everything belongs to God, and everything is distributed by God.” I hope that sounds familiar, if it doesn’t, I hope it will become familiar. What the master gave to the servants was never really theirs.

God gives responsibilities to His servants according to their strengths and abilities. For some servants, that’s a lot; for others, a little less. God is looking for thoughtful, faithful servants. Good servants felt the responsibility of their assignment and went to work without delay. Good servants used the money and worked. Good servants were given increased responsibility and a share in the master’s Joy.

In Chapter 24, the same idea is taught by Jesus: The faithful, wise servant will keep working while the master is away, carefully executing direct commands and working on the Master’s behalf and benefit. “Blessed/Happy is the slave who His master finds doing so when he returns.” Matthew 24:46.

There is a sense in which those who serve the Master ought not to do just the bare minimum. “What are minimum standards for a disciple of Jesus?” That’s a nonsensical question.

Good and faithful servants show their goodness and faithfulness as servants by their lives. James says that in 3:13. Good living shows wisdom and understanding. We are considered righteous when our faith prompts action. James 2:24 says, “A person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.” Servants, honor the Master’s faith in you with good, productive living.

GOOD SERVANTS EXPECT A JUST REWARD.

God looks for good and faithful servants and rewards those as such. A share in the master’s joy is the reward. JOY is an important thing here, not to be missed. Typically, we focus on the joy of heaven, the joy of eternal life as the reward for faithful service, but I am not convinced it’s just that. Faithfully serving the master brings joy in this life, too. A hymn says,

There is joy in serving Jesus, as I journey on my way,
Joy that fills my heart with praises, every hour and every day.

There is joy in serving Jesus. Joy that triumphs over pain
Fills my soul with Heaven’s music, till I join the glad refrain.

There is joy, joy, joy in serving Jesus. Joy that throbs within my heart;
Every moment, every hour, as I draw upon His power;
There is joy, joy, joy that never shall depart.”
But God also punishes those who are not interested in serving the master out of false fear, laziness, etc. The servant who abandons his responsibilities and avoids work will be judged and cast out.

As Jesus tells the story, there is a focus on the Resources, Labor, Time, and Profit. The master expects a profit, a return on his investment. Christians, what is the profit God expects from His investment in your life? What are you doing with the resources He has provided you? Whether it is large or small, are you laboring to increase your Master’s investment? Giving back to God exactly what He’s given us will not be suitable. It involves more than playing it safe and doing little or nothing. It demands the kind of service that produces results. He is not just interested in the principal—he wants interest. Time is limited.