

INTRODUCTION

Companies have various ways to motivate their employees to work hard. A common trick is a bonus system to reward employees who have exceptional performance. The company that I worked for many years ago did that too. Toward the end of the year everyone was required to evaluate their peers, then supervisors would also assess how well each teammate accomplished their goals. There were a lot of head-scratching! All that information would determine how big a bonus, if any, each worker would get. In January of the following year each person would receive a report. More than likely everyone would put their sole focus on two numbers: how much raise he can get in the New Year and how much bonus he will receive. Reward is a positive way to encourage us to work harder. This method has Biblical foundation too. When we resume our discussion on Christ's return, our Lord told us in today's passage of Matthew 25 that He will give us reward at His second coming. Two Sundays ago we studied the signs of Christ's return. Jesus told us clearly that He will come back in the future. But He also made it plain that no one knows for sure when that will happen. Because of that Jesus said in [Matthew 24:42](#) - Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. The Chinese Union Version accurately translates the meaning of "watch." It is not only to pay attention, but the word also carries a connotation of being vigilant. Vigilance leads to wise planning and actions. It is like if the weather forecast predicts a high chance of storm on the weekend then you may postpone an outdoor activity. Jesus used a series of metaphors and parables in chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew to further illustrate the point of staying alert for His return. The key idea is evident: since we do not know when Christ will return we have to be ready at any time.

EXPLANATION

The passage we study today is a parable. The plot should be quite easy to understand. A master was leaving home for an extended period of time. He entrusted huge sums of money to three servants. At his return the master dealt with the servants differently based on how they used the money they were given. What can we learn from this parable?

First up, it is quite obvious that the master in the parable is a portrayal of Jesus Himself. Let us look at [verses 14-15](#) one more time: 14 Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. 15 To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. "Talent" (or rendered "thousand" in the Chinese Union Version) is a measure of money. In Jesus' time one talent is about 17 years' of salary for an ordinary workman. It is a large sum of money in any standard. Jesus said clearly that the reason why the three servants were given different amount of money was because the master knew they had varied abilities. We are created in God's image and so to certain extent we are equal. But then each of us is unique. We can all speak but some people are more eloquent. We can all listen but some people are more sensitive to certain particular sound. We can all think but some people are quick thinkers. When God puts believers in the same church He also gives each person different

spiritual gifts. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 12:11** that: All these (*meaning the disbursement of various gifts to different believers*) are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. We should not compare ourselves with our brothers and sisters, nor should we feel proud or jealous. Rather, just like the teaching in the parable we study today, we should use the gifts and talents God has given us effectively. Does God give you musical talent? Come serve in our music ministry. Does God give you patience and love for little kids? Join us in the children's ministries. Do you love to cook? Use that interest God gives you to care for others in a tangible way.

In the parable Jesus told us that the two servants who received five and two talents, respectively, actively invested the money they received. They were not only faithful in the resources the master entrusted them, they were also very eager in carrying out their tasks. **Verses 16-17** read: 16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. 17 So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. Without delay the two servants immediately invested the money they were entrusted. Those money-conscious people among us may wonder what investment they were into that produced 100 % profit. Folks, may I remind you that this is just a parable? Don't think too much about the details. The point Jesus tried to make was that the both servants put effort in their work and they yielded revenue from it. At the master's return both servants reported their achievement to their boss. The master gave exactly the same compliment to both of them. Let us look at **verse 21**: '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 master described those two servants as good and faithful. By "good" they contributed something beneficial to the master by gaining wealth. By "faithful" they were diligent in using the resources given effectively. They received the same compliment not because of how much they gained but in their business venture they proved to be faithful. Bear in mind that the master was away for a lengthy period. They could have laid back and taken it easy on their work. At your work place if your manager takes off early some of your colleagues may spend time sipping coffee and chit chat instead of working. After all, the boss is not watching. True faithfulness is reflected when nobody is paying attention to what you do. The same is true for church ministries. Why vacuum the carpet or scrub the dishes so hard when no one is keeping score? Why come 15 minutes earlier to prepare your ministries when everyone else comes 10 min late? The truth is, even when no one sees your effort, God does and ultimately it is Him who will evaluate your contribution. Beside a verbal affirmation the master also rewarded the two faithful servants in two ways. They will be in-charge of many things. This is contrary to what this world tells us. Some people equate work to imprisonment and so the smarter people get the less work they need to do and the bigger pay check they can get. Following the same logic once a person retires he should stop working altogether and enjoy life. Not so in God's Kingdom! If one proves to be faithful in this life, then God will entrust him with more responsibilities in eternity. Besides putting in-charge of more things the other reward the master gave to the faithful servants was to share his happiness. This sharing of happiness elevates the servants beyond more than getting their job done. They too feel the joy at the prosperity of the master. That should be the same attitude we have when we serve our Lord. When we serve with a willing heart we will serve with joy, whether we are given a big or small task. If we feel that serving the Lord in this life is a grueling burden then how can we serve Him joyfully in eternity?

In many Biblical passages we are told that those who are faithfully serving the Lord will receive reward. Let us consider some of them. Paul says in **Philippians 3:13-14** that: 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Also, in **2 Timothy 4:7-8** Paul testified: 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. The Bible does not specify what kind of reward God has reserved for us. The “crown of righteousness” may not be an actual crown on people’s head. To me it is God’s wisdom for not telling us what we may be getting, lest some people may use our earthly perspective to evaluate it and lament: “What? That’s the kind of reward for me? What is the worth of it?” If our Lord knows our earthly needs more than we do and is willing and able to provide us more than we ask or expect I do not think that the heavenly reward will disappoint us. Therefore, instead of keep thinking what reward we will get we should just remain faithful in the things God entrusts us – our time, financial resources and material possessions, whether in our work place, at home or in the church. In **1 Corinthians 3** Paul used an analogy of building to remind us that we should invest what God has given us wisely. He said in **verses 12-14**: 12 If any man builds on this foundation (*referring to Jesus Christ*) using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. 14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. When Christ comes again He will do a quality inspection on our work. The durable materials that can withstand fire can refer to works that have eternal value, whereas the flammable materials that will be consumed in fire can refer to works that only have temporary value. The question for brothers and sisters is: what materials do you use to build in your life?

Jesus reminded us that since we do not know when He will return we have to be ready at any time. The two faithful servants in the parable worked diligently to invest the money the master entrusted them. In contrast, the third servant was not faithful in his responsibility. **Verse 18** says: But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. He might be thinking that burying the asset would be a safe way to preserve it. At the master’s return this servant simply gave back the same amount to the master – nothing more but nothing less. What seems to be the problem? The key issue is that the master did not ask his servants to stow away the money. He expected them to invest it. In **verses 24-25** this unfaithful servant even justified himself: 24 ...'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 talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' He was so overcome by fear that his master might ask him for what he did not have, possibly to compensate a loss out of his pocket. Therefore, the smartest way is not to risk losing anything. In the master’s response he used the servant’s own words to rebuke him. **Verses 26-27** read: 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. The master called this servant wicked and lazy because he did not have the master’s benefit in mind. He only cared about how to protect himself. Even if he was so afraid to lose money he could have done the minimal by investing the money in a bank to earn some interest. This

servant was not condemned for doing something wrong. He was condemned for not even trying! Still remember that the master was away for a long period of time? Just imagine what this servant might be doing while his two colleagues were busy looking for ways to maximize the profit for their master. They might be checking their computers for the market value of stocks and mutual funds when he might be looking on the internet for the latest games to kill time. They might be traveling about to buy and sell properties for the master while he might be cruising around to hang out with his buddies. You get the picture. How did the master punish him? Look at **verses 28-30**: 28 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. 29 For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' The one talent he had was given to the servant who had ten talents. This treatment is consistent with what the master said earlier that for whoever that was faithful he would be given more responsibility. Secondly, we are told in verse 30 that this unfaithful servant would be kicked out from the home of the master. The expression of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is used six times in Matthew. In all the occurrences it is referred to a future judgment of unbelievers. For example, in the parable of the net in **Matthew 13** Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man collecting fish with a net. After he reeled in what he gathered he would keep the fish of good value and throw away worthless items. In **verses 49-50** Jesus explained the moral of the parable: 49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Therefore, it is obvious that "weeping and gnashing of teeth" refers to the reaction of the unbelievers when they are thrown into hell. There will be eternal punishment and eternal sorrow. But worst of all, there will be eternal separation from God. As much as we do not like to hear that ending, the truth is that at Jesus' return there will be a final judgment for those who do not know Christ. If we look back at the attitude of this unfaithful servant toward the master we cannot see any love and respect. He thought that the master was a exploitive harsh man. He only had fear toward his master. Dear friends: are you the third servant? In this life you are given the opportunity to know Jesus Christ. God puts Christian family members, friends and colleagues around you. They invite you to the church, and there you are sitting here today listening to this message. There will be a time when Jesus will come back and settle the account with you. Jesus will ask if you have taken advantage of the opportunity He gave you to come to know Him. If your reply is "no" then it will be too late. Accept Him as your Savior and Lord, so that when Jesus returns you will be sharing His eternal joy with many brothers and sisters.

CONCLUSION

Since we do not know when Christ will return we have to be ready at any time. As we are waiting for His return we have to continue to work hard for His Kingdom, and be ready to give an account to the Lord. Depending on how the Lord sees our capabilities we are given different resources to invest for Him. Jesus looks for faithfulness in us. Don't squander all the privilege and opportunities He has given us. As one Bible commentator said: "grace never condones irresponsibility." I hope that brothers and sisters long for the same compliment from the master: "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!"