

September 29, 2020

Words of challenge and illumination for today.

We all wonder what the kingdom of heaven will be like. Jesus in today's Scripture explains what the kingdom of heaven is like. Jesus is telling us that the kingdom is here and now and it is shown to the world in the way that we Christians live. If we live as the rest of the world lives then the kingdom remains unknown to others. Yet, if we live as Jesus commands then the kingdom of heaven is revealed to others through us.

Renowned author Philip Yancey writes in *Church: Why Bother?*, the strict and controlled environment of the southern fundamentalist church of his youth stifled his personal faith. All of the mystery and humility had been stripped away from Jesus by the fierce condemnation of the religious community. "In short", Yancey concludes, "Christianity kept me from Christ" (*Church: Why Bother? My Personal Pilgrimage*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998. 19). So it is with many Christians and churches today which have an excessively rigid and legalistic approach to their brand of religion.

The administration of this kind of system, whether it be religious, political, economic, or social is an irresponsible use of God's resources, property, or appointment. Therefore, it is incumbent upon every Christian to do their part to prevent these kinds of abuse from occurring.

Today let's examine individual responsibility for the management of God's resources. After all, any institution is composed of individuals. And if we as individuals cannot responsibly manage God's resources, then understandably we cannot manage them collectively or in

community. In today's devotion we will also see how we live can reveal the kingdom of heaven to others. Let us read Matthew 25:14-30.

*14 "For it is [The kingdom of heaven] just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. 15 To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. 16 Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. 17 In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. 18 But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 "Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20 The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 22 "Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' 24 "And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. 25 And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.' 26 "But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. 27 Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my moneyback with interest. 28 Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the*

*one who has the ten talents.’ 29 “For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. 30 Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

The kingdom of Heaven is like (vs. 14-15) a person who entrusts their possessions to their slaves/servants. This parable is a continuation of Jesus’ description of what heaven will be like after His return. Matthew 24:42-51 is a warning to us that we should be ready for Jesus’ coming. After this warning Jesus tells us what the kingdom of heaven will be like upon His return.

The Master divides His possessions among the slaves/servants according to the ability of the individual slaves. There is no doubt that Jesus is the Master and that His followers are the slaves in this parable. The one’s with five and two talents (vs. 16-17; 20-23) invested their talents immediately and diligently.

We are also cautioned to be diligent in investing what God entrusts to us. The Sage writes, “Poor is the one who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (Proverbs 10:4). As a result of their diligence and obedience these slaves received dividends on their investments. Are you diligently investing the resources God entrusts to you? These two slaves received the praises and blessings of their Master. Moreover, they were placed in positions of greater responsibility; responsibility which is commensurate with their ability.

The slave who received one talent (vs. 18; 24-28) failed to use the talent entrusted to him by the Master. This slave made many excuses for his laziness and inaction. This slave even declared he knew what sort of person the master was. James, the brother of Jesus admonishes, “To the one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to that

person it is sin” (James 4:17). This slave did not enter into the joy of his Master, rather he received rebuke, condemnation, and the loss of what he had.

There was a second reward from the Master to the one who now has ten talents. The Master’s explanation (vs. 29-30) is hard for us to accept and understand. Yet, what is said is that if you do not use what God has given to you responsibly, then you will lose whatever has been given to you. It is like your muscles. If you do not use or exercise your muscles, then they will atrophy and become weak and worthless. They will cease to be of benefit and ultimately if left alone you will lose the use of them completely.

We must learn to be responsible in those few things which God entrusts to us. We must not be afraid to use what God places into our care. Remember that we are not given a spirit of timidity and fear, rather we have been given a spirit of courage and boldness.

Furthermore, we must understand that “Bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” and “Godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment” (1 Timothy 4:8; 6:6).

The following story was told to many years ago. Once there was a day when ice cream cost much less than it does today. And on one of these days a little 10 year old boy walked into the neighborhood diner and sat down at one of the tables. A waitress put a glass of water down on the table in front of the young boy. “How much does an ice cream sundae cost?” he asked.

“Fifty cents,” huffed the waitress. The little boy pulled his hand out of his pocket and thoughtfully examined the coins in his hand. “How much is a dish of plain ice cream?” he questioned. Some people were now

waiting in line for a table and the waitress was becoming increasingly impatient with the boy. "Thirty-five cents," the waitress snapped. The little boy counted his coins one more time.

With the innocence which only a ten year old possesses he looked intently at the waitress and said, "I'll have the plain ice cream please." The waitress brought the plain ice cream and placed the check on the table next to it then walked away without another word.

The boy finished the ice cream, paid the cashier and went on his way. Soon the waitress came back to clean the table. As she was wiping the table off she suddenly became very embarrassed by the way she had treated the boy. For right next to the empty dish were two nickels and five pennies-her tip.

My invitation to you is simple and direct. Examine yourselves today and see that you are using what God has entrusted to you in a responsible way which is acceptable to God. Be like the two slaves who invested their talents. Be like the little boy who sacrificed his own desires for the good of another. If you are not sure what God has entrusted to you pray and ask God to show you what is entrusted to you, then use those things appropriately. Finally, for those who have never met Jesus. I encourage you to ask Him into your heart today so that you will know what is entrusted to you. Let us pray.

*Heavenly Father, I thank you for entrusting all that we have into our care. I pray You will guide us by Your Holy Spirit to use all in our care to glorify You through Jesus Christ, amen.*

It is not what you have that is important; it is how you use what you have that is important. Use everything to glorify God.

Until the nets are full