

Glory in His Face: The Coming Judge

Matthew 25:14-30

By [David Strain](#)

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Now would you please take your copies of God's Word and turn with me in them to Matthew's gospel chapter 25. Matthew chapter 25. You'll find our reading on page 830 if you're using one of the pew Bibles. Before we read God's Word together let's bow our heads and ask for His help in prayer. Let's pray.

Your Word, O Lord, is living and active. It is sharper than a double-edged sword, piercing, penetrating to the division of joint and marrow, soul and spirit, exposing to the view of Him with whom we have to do the secret thoughts and intentions of the heart so that we are exposed and naked in Your gaze. And so with trembling we come to the reading and exposition of Your Word asking, O Lord, that Your Spirit would illumine the page and give light to our minds. Help us to see Christ and flee to Him and to flee from ourselves, to see our own dereliction and bankruptcy and need, to despair of self, and grant to us confidence in Christ. Do this by Your Word and for Your glory, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Matthew chapter 25 at verse 14. This is the inspired and inerrant Word of Almighty God. Jesus said:

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 everyone who has will more will 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."

Amen, and we praise God that He has spoken to us in His holy, inerrant, and sufficient Word. May He write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

Christ the Coming Judge: Matthew's Message in these Parables

Have you ever been in the congregation during an especially pointed sermon when sin is being addressed, people are being called out for disobedience, consciences are being pricked and hearts exposed by the bright light of the Word of God shining into the dark places of our lives, and you find yourself, you know, sort of craning your neck, looking around for Mrs. So-and-So, maybe you even make eye contact and sort of nod - "I hope you're listening! This is perfect for you!" In the passage we've read together tonight we have one place where we might be particularly tempted to do some neck craning and finger pointing. It comes in the context of a string of Jesus' parables in Matthew chapters 24 and 25, parables and sayings, all of them dealing with the final return of Jesus Christ to judge the world. So for example, chapter 24 and verse 30, Jesus says, "Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man and then all the tribes of the earth shall mourn and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." 24:36 - we read, "Concerning the day or the hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." Or look down at 25:31. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations and he will separate people from one another as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." So this is a portion of Scripture dealing with the great fact that Jesus is coming back. No one knows when, but when He does He will judge all peoples, condemning the wicked, rewarding the righteous.

That's the message of these chapters and it no doubt would have been easy for the disciples to whom Jesus is here speaking, just as it is for us today, to do a little self righteous neck-craning and eyebrow-raising and finger-pointing, perhaps hoping that some Pharisee might overhear. "You know, one day they're really going to get it. I hope they're listening!" But for all who hear warnings like these from the lips of Christ and think about other people, chapter 25 issues a shock, a jolt of electricity because it turns the tables on us and exposes the disciples themselves, it exposes the church, professing Christians like you and me, to the very same warnings. Would you look at the text with me please?

Be Prepared and Be Productive

Chapter 25 verses 1 to 13 give us the famous parable of the ten virgins, the point of which is stated with crystal clarity at the end of the parable. Here is Jesus' instructions to the disciples who want to know how to live between the first coming and the final return of Christ. "Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." Jesus is talking to those who call themselves disciples and He's reminding them that those who are truly devoted to Him, who really trust Him, like the virgins waiting for the bridegroom, will be ready when He comes. "Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour." Be ready. And then in verses 14 to 30, the passage we'll be studying together this evening, the message is likewise concerned with life between the departure of Christ and His return. The focus is still on how disciples, those who profess to be followers of Christ, should live in light of His coming return. In our story, Jesus is clearly the master of the house who has gone on a trip, who has gone away. That is, He has ascended; He has risen from the grave and He has departed from us. And the servants who work in the master's house are once again, the disciples - that's you and me. Unlike the previous parable, however, the message of the parable of the talents is not simply be prepared, but be productive. It's not just be ready, but get busy. It's not merely watch, but also work. The point is not just to summon us to readiness to whenever Christ finally returns but to motivate us to fruitfulness in Christ's service while we wait for His return.

And I want you to notice the three ways in this parable that Jesus motivates us to that life of fruitfulness. First, we are called to remember the riches of Gospel privilege. Remember the riches of Gospel privileges. Then secondly, embrace the promise of generous rewards. Embrace the promise of generous rewards. And then finally, flee the certainty of coming wrath. Flee the certainty of coming wrath.

I. Remember the Riches of Gospel Privileges

First of all we are called here to remember the riches of Gospel privilege. Look at verses 14 and 15. "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.” So it’s not a particularly unusual picture for the ancient world. Jesus depicts Himself, as we’ve said, as the master of a great house. And as was common in those days the master owned slaves. That’s what the word translated here “servants” really means. And it’s important that we grasp that because the message of this parable in no small measure depends on seeing that point. These are his slaves, not merely his servants. That means they own him their diligence and their faithfulness by virtue of the relationship between them. That is their obligation. They’re not hired workers. They are owned slaves and that places duties and obligations upon them that were not contingent upon the terms and conditions of employment. They’re not unionized laborers who’d negotiated a contract in exchange for services rendered. They are slaves.

Disciples and Slaves of the Lord Jesus

That is, you know, the status of a disciple of Jesus Christ. We are not merely contracted workers, performing duties in exchange for payment. We are not hired hands. There is no *quid pro quo* in the kingdom of heaven. We are owned and possessed by Christ if we are Christians. “We are not our own,” Paul says. “We have been bought with a price, therefore honor God with your bodies.” You belong to Jesus; you owe Him your all. Slaves. Nevertheless, when we think about slaves in the New Testament we shouldn’t necessarily think in terms of the horrors of the British and American slave trades in which Africans were forcibly and sinfully abducted from their homes and made to work without rights or prospects of release in perpetuity. In the New Testament, household slaves were often highly educated and skilled, even regularly better educated than their masters. They were trusted to manage the estates and oversee the master’s business interests. And faithful slaves were often well paid and able to purchase their own manumission.

In Jesus’ story, the master knows the respected capabilities of his various servants and he divides his wealth between them in accordance with their abilities before he leaves on the journey. To the first he gives five talents, to the second two, the third one talent. Now, the English word “talent” there in our text is unfortunate as a translation. It’s actually a transliteration of the Greek word, *talenton*, which was in fact a measurement; it is a unit of weight. So Jesus is not saying here that before the master went on his journey he taught one slave how to play the banjo and another, you know, the art of origami; how to make a really great tiramisu. He gave them talents to be sure, but not “talents” as we typically use the word. In fact, as verse 18 makes especially plain, what Jesus has in mind are measurements of money. There’s debate about whether this is silver or gold but either way it’s a huge sum of money; a staggering amount given to the care of these slaves. A denarius was about one day’s wage for a laborer. Six thousand denarii per talent. Fifteen years pay. Now think about it - the master leaves the first slave five talents - seventy-five years worth of wages. Even the

slave to whom only one talent is given is nevertheless given a very large sum of money. The implication is clear. The master expects a return on his investment, but don't miss the point. The equivalent of millions of dollars are here being entrusted to each slave.

The Church: A Stunning Picture of Unimaginable Privileges

A stunning picture of the privileges given to us within the community of disciples. I wonder if that's how you evaluate your blessings as members of the visible church. Do you count them staggering riches? If we were to take someone from the poorest nations of the world and have them live with an average income family here in Jackson I'm sure they would be staggered by what they would consider the abundance of riches that we tend to take for granted; they've become common place. I wonder if in the church that's also happened to us. We live with an embarrassment of Gospel riches, Gospel privileges. I wonder if we've stopped noticing. Never has a master lavished such generosity upon his slaves as Christ has lavished upon His church. Think about the riches that are ours. We have the means of grace, the Word, and the ordinances of Gospel worship. We have the prayers of the saints and the fellowship of the people of God. We have the oversight of elders, the training and instruction of godly families; we have the Gospel of grace preached to us week after week. We have the good news that Christ bore our sin in His body on the tree and died that any and all who trust him might be pardoned freely. And that good news is not news to us! We hear again and again the promise of pardon and acceptance and adoption to all who will cling to Christ. Upon our assemblies the Spirit of Christ descends, convicting of sin, illuminating the truth in our hearts. Week after week, right in front of our eyes, we get to see the drama working itself out in the lives of brothers and sisters of ours who are being transformed into the likeness of Christ. Some are brought out of darkness and into the light of Christ. Others who are mourning are comforted, strengthening still others through the worst trials imaginable, the Spirit filling them with Gospel peace even amidst tears. We see others face down temptation and win the victory by the grace of God. And we watch others stumble and fall and find restoring, cleansing grace by the mercy of God. We watched aged saints cross the finish line in triumph and families take their first steps with brand new covenant children teaching them and admonishing them and raising them in the instruction and nurture of the Lord, training up their children in the way they should go.

Within the Master's house, His slaves enjoy incalculable Gospel privileges. If you profess to be a Christian, you are a slave in the Master's house. You own Him your diligent obedience without regard to payment and yet He has bestowed on you unimaginable riches. What will you do with the investment? That's the question this parable is asking us. What will you do with the investments? What do you do with the Gospel message preached to you week in and week out as you watch other people around you, perhaps, improve the Master's investment, believing Christ, laboring for His glory, going hard after the honor of God, what do

you do with the riches entrusted to you? Will Christ have a return on His investment in your life? Remember the riches of Gospel privilege. Jesus is seeking to motivate us to preparedness and to diligence and to work in His service in light of His imminent return.

II. Embrace the Promise of Generous Rewards

Then secondly, Jesus motivates us by calling us to embrace the promise of generous reward. Embrace the promise of generous reward. Look at verses 16 to 23. The first slave with five talents immediately begins to trade with those resources and doubles his investment, giving him ten. The second slave does the same, giving him four. After a long time, verse 18, the master came back. Here is Jesus, by the way, preparing His disciples for the long delay between His resurrection and His return. And notice the work Jesus does when He comes. He comes back, we're told, to settle accounts. He comes back to judge. And that judgment is focused here not on the world out there - He will judge the world, but that isn't the message here. His message here is that judgment begins with the house of God, with the family of God. It begins in here, not out there. His slaves are all called and made to give an account. And when he receives the report from the first two, with their one hundred percent profit margin, look at his reply in verse 20 and again in 23 - "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." Three parts to that remarkable reply. We could perhaps summarize them in three words - commendation, promotion, communion. Commendation, promotion, communion.

The Commendation of Christ

First of all commendation. When Jesus comes back He will say to His disciples, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Good and faithful slave." To everyone who demonstrates they are indeed good and faithful disciples, who take the Gospel investment and multiply it in faith in Christ and by diligence and obedience to His Word and will in their lives, over them He will pronounce His, "Well done." Some of us are living in bondage to people-pleasing. We live or die by the approval of our peers, our parents, our colleagues. The fear of disappointing other people has driven the acid of guilt deep into our hearts and corroded our joy. We need to be reminded that the smile of heaven, the approbation of Jesus, is the only verdict worth shaping your life around. It's not that it's wrong to look for approval, it's that our target is too low. If you live for the approval of men, it will be the standard and norms of men that will shape your life. But if you live for the praise of Christ, it will be the demands of Christ that will shape your life. Commendation. Don't you long to hear the Master's, "Well done! Well done!" - Jesus saying that to us! It's stunning! "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Oh for that day! Commendation.

Promotion by Christ

Then there's promotion. The master tells the two profitable slaves, "You've been faithful over a little; I will set you over much." Over a little - six thousand denarii to one talent. One guy is given seventy-five years it is of wages; that's what he has at the end of his investment. Seventy-five years worth in his hands. "Faithful over a little," Jesus says. That is an extravagant sum of money and yet compared to the reward for faithfulness, it is, says our master, "but a little." It's nothing compared with what is coming. It is nothing compared to the glory that is yet to be revealed in us. Here's a principle in the kingdom of God - Jesus Christ rewards faithfulness often with still greater responsibility. He rewards faithfulness often with still greater responsibility. The grace offered to us in the great Gospel privileges needs to be improved; we need to profit from it. We need to put it to work. We must believe the Gospel. We must trust Christ. We must put sin to death. We must go hard after obedience. And when we do, showing ourselves to be good and faithful slaves of our Master, the day will come when Jesus will give to us status and privileges that make the privileges we currently enjoy pale into insignificance. Sometimes we think of heaven as a sort of passive place, full of inactivity - strumming your harp, perhaps. But Jesus says that faithfulness in Gospel work here will lead to glory work hereafter. When the Master comes we will receive not merely a word of commendation but a promotion. We've not all been given five talents or two or one; we each have unique opportunities. Our privileges vary. Our respective calling, the spheres within which we must work out our salvation are as varied as we are from one another. Our responsibilities to the Master are not all alike. But if we trust the Gospel of grace, if we cling to Christ, and in faith seek to be faithful to His calling in our lives, the little over which we have been set will one day give way to much. We will come to share in the lordship and reign and victory and glory of Jesus Himself.

Communion with Christ

Which is the point of the third thing he says - commendation, promotion, communion. "Enter into the joy of your master." That's wonderful. Slaves entering into the joy of their master. Of all the blessings promised, this is the sweetest and the most precious. The master himself, we're being told here, is full of joy over the faithfulness of his slaves. He loves them; he delights in their diligence in his service, and now he invites them to share his joy. It's an invitation to fellowship, to communion as junior partners with him in the governance of his estate. It's an invitation to share his own joy, to participate in the endless exchange of joy he currently delights in. The metaphor of slaves and masters actually here now begins at last to disintegrate and the greater reality shines through our destiny. Think about this - our destiny - if we will be faithful in using and improving our Gospel privileges, is joyous fellowship with Jesus forever and mutuality with Him and delight in Him.

Rewards in Heaven?

Some of us, I suspect, are perhaps a little squeamish about the idea of rewards in heaven. We fear that it's somehow imperils the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. How can salvation be a free gift and at the same time rewards be based on the faithfulness of the slaves of the master working in his household? Well whatever the answer to that dilemma, it is not a dilemma that Jesus is at all disturbed by. He sees no contradiction between graciously given Gospel privileges and graciously promised future rewards. And our need to make everything make sense notwithstanding, neither should we see any contradiction between them. But it might help to remember that the work we do is itself only the fruit of grace and the rewards we will enjoy will far exceed the merits of our best obedience so that they too will be gifts of grace. John Newton, we've been hearing from him all day - Ligon quoted from him, remember, this morning. The children sang this morning. I had prepared to tell you exactly the same verses again this evening. Newton got it right, didn't he? "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved. How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed? Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come. 'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home." It's grace in its origin, in its beginning. It's grace that sustains us. It's grace that makes us fruitful and then grace that rewards our fruitfulness so that at the last we won't say, "Why did you reward me when it's all of grace?" you will say, "Why do you reward me when my works are so meager and slight and threadbare and pitiful?" And He will say, "It is all of grace." And we will bless the Lord for His goodness to us in His Son. Remember the riches of Gospel privilege, embrace the promise of generous reward, and labor hard for the smile of your master.

III. Flee the Certainty of Coming Wrath

But then finally, flee the certainty of coming wrath. Not all the slaves in the master's household are faithful and not all are rewarded. The last of the three buries his one talent when the master left. When he came home that slave had only the original deposit to return to him. Look at his reasoning in verse 24. "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 is what is yours." The slave's attitude to his master is in fact actually how many people think about Jesus, isn't it? He's hard, judgmental, overly restrictive; He asks more of us than is reasonable. And so this slave's actions, he says, are motivated by fear. And he does nothing with the riches entrusted to him. He is an image of the mere church-goer. These are all slaves in the master's household. These are all professing disciples. This slave is an image of the mere church-goer - someone who has lived all his life with the great privileges Jesus has given to the church, heard the Gospel week in and week out, but he's never grasped the goodness of the good news. The Gospel with which he's so familiar has never really sunk in. He does nothing with the grace offered to him. He makes no improvement of the riches lavished upon

him. The Gospel just remains external to him. It has never changed his heart. All he has to show the Lord Jesus when He comes are the privileges he enjoyed in this life, but there's no fruit, there's no profit margin on the Master's investment. While he's lived like a slave in the Master's house, he is at the last revealed as someone with no real interest in serving the Master at all.

A Return on the Master's Investment

And look at what the master says, "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." Excuses won't do, do you see, when the master comes home. A heart that reveres Him, works for Him. A life that trusts Christ, serves His cause. If there is no interest earned on the capital invested, we're revealed for the traitors we really are, actually serving ourselves, not our Master, not our Savior. And so in the end, the faithless slave is stripped of even the little that he enjoys and he is cast, verse 30, "into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." You can surround your life with all the religion you like. You can read the best books. You can learn your catechism. You can sing the hymns of the faith with gusto. You can become a connoisseur of the best preaching and educate your palate to prefer the most rarified Reformed theology. But if there is no real fruit, there has been no real faith and there will be no future for you. If there is no profit, then privileges notwithstanding, there will be no paradise. If there is no holiness, there will be no heaven.

Remember the riches of Gospel privilege, embrace the promise of generous reward, and flee the certainty of coming wrath. I am persuaded that hell will be populated by surprised church-goers who thought themselves safe because they buried their talent until the Master came home. Will you have a return on the Master's investment to show for all His investment, the great riches He's lavished upon you? Will you believe the Gospel or will you leave it all as an external thing? Will there be fruit? Will there be a return? Will there be evidence that you are indeed a good and faithful servant?

Will you pray with me?

Our Father, we tremble before You because as we examine our hearts we know we are sinners. We are easily diverted from paths of obedience. And so we cling to You and we run to Christ and we cry to You for mercy and we pray for grace that Your gracious investment in us, providing the Gospel to us, would not fall on deaf ears, would not go unimproved, uninvested. Help us now here tonight to believe, to rest on Christ, to cling to Him, and then begin to labor for His glory with all of our might, not as eye servants and man-pleasers, but as unto the Lord, that we may indeed hear His, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!' when He comes at last. And we ask this in our Savior's name. Amen.

Will you stand and receive God's benediction?

And now may grace, mercy, and peace from Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.

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