

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Mt. 25:14-30

"Kingdom Living (7): The Law of Use"

ANOTHER KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

We have been doing a series on Kingdom Living. What does it mean to live by seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? It is to understand and put into practice the principles and laws of the Kingdom of God. Just as there are physical laws which govern the physical world, there are spiritual laws that govern the spiritual world. The overarching law is the law of love. It is why Jesus summed up God's law by saying that the greatest commandment is to ***"love the Lord your God with all your soul, heart, mind and strength. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it – you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two laws depend the whole Law and the Prophets."*** (Mt. 22:37-40). In other words, all of God's Word are based on these two laws! For *"the Law and the Prophets"* was the title for the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament. Thus, any principle or law in God's Kingdom is really a reflection of the greater law, the law of love, and must always serve love's purpose.

So for example we have spoken so far about the law of generosity and the law of service. Both are tangible reflections of the law of love. We show our love by how much we give and how much we serve. Today I want us to look at another law of God's Kingdom – the law of use.

Jesus highlights the importance of this law in His Parable of the Talents which we heard in our Gospel lesson today: He says, ***14"For it (the Kingdom of Heaven) is 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 money back 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.*’” (Mt. 25:14-30)*

So what is Jesus really talking about here? In the parable we have a “lord” who has servants (the NASB translation translates the Greek *doulous* as “slaves,” but it really should be servants as is the case in most other translations). The lord gives his slaves “talents” which is actually a measurement of money. One talent was equivalent to about 130 pounds - whether that is 130 pounds of silver or gold or some other precious metal. Jesus' use of the word "talent" in this parable is what led to the word being used in the sense of a "gift" or "skill" in the English language.

In other words, the servants are receiving something of great value. Their master entrusts them with gifted wealth. What are they going to do with it? The two servants with the five and two talents respectively multiply their Master’s wealth and produce more. But the servant who received the one talent not only did not produce anything with it, but he buried it and did not even use it!

The servants with the five and two talents were commended for doubling their Master’s wealth, but the one with one talent was not only rebuked but had his one talent taken away from him. And then Jesus said these profound words, “***For to everyone who has shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but from everyone who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. And cast out the worthless servant into outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***”

Such language clues us in to the fact that this parable has less to do about money per se, and more to do with a far greater issue – life itself and the things in life that God has given us. God teaches us that all good things in life originate from God and continually come from Him. There is nothing that we have that was not first given to us by God. And what God gives us – not just our bodies and the resources for life in our natural world - but the actual capacity to know and to love God and others by how we live and ultimately to be able to do this eternally – is of immeasurable value in comparison to silver or gold. And it is not even the amount that God gives us that really matters. It is how we use the gifts – (i.e. everything in this life). Hence, the principle of the law of use.

There is a passage in Paul’s letter to the **1 Corinthians 4:1-2** that bears this out, that I have mentioned before. But never have I had everyone actually turn to it. I want you to do that with me today. “***Let a man***

regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

Here we have the two most important aspects in life as it pertains to expressing our love for God and our love for others: service and stewardship. Service is putting love into action – serving others to bless them and glorify God. If service is at the heart of kingdom living and love, then stewardship is service's twin. For stewardship is how we use what we have in life to benefit others and glorify God. Greatness in God's Kingdom is linked to these two – how much we serve and how much are we faithful in what God has given us.

It is why the Apostle Paul highlights these two. They are at the heart of being a follower of Jesus Christ. We are servants of Christ and stewards of His grace – all that He has given us. And all that matters is if we are found trustworthy or faithful in what God has given us. Think about that for a moment. It does not matter how much you know in life, how much you earn or gain, or where you come from, even what you do professionally; what matters is are you faithful with what God has given you and are you faithful to those whom God has given you – your personal relationships. How do we use the things God has given us and the relationships God has given us?

Now the greatest gift that we can give to people is our love, but true love is always trustworthy, it is always faithful. If you lose a person's trust, you lose everything. That is why in God's Kingdom money is not king, know-how is not king, not even accomplishment is king; in God's Kingdom character is king. And a trustworthy character will result in godly stewardship.

But the one who does nothing with what God gives him in the natural world will not receive anything in the spiritual realm – in the life to come. What little he has in this life – or even if it is much – will be taken away from him (***“but from everyone who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away***). He will receive nothing in eternity, not even eternal life but the prospect of eternal judgment – ***“into outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”***

And yet for the one who uses what God has given him, he will continue to be blessed abundantly. ***“Well done thou good and faithful servant – you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”***

Now last week we spoke of the law of service, but this week we are going to look at the *law of use* – which in effect is putting into practice godly or faithful stewardship.

HOW DO WE MAINTAIN FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP?

So how do we put it into practice? How do we maintain faithful stewardship? First, we recognize that everything good in life is given to us by God, who is a God who loves us and is good to us. As we heard in the parable, the Master entrusted valuable possessions to his servants. But it was their attitude and understanding of their master and what had been given them that made all the difference. Our attitude towards the Lord will determine what we receive from the Lord. Recall **Hebrews 11:6**, ***“Now he who comes to God in faith must believe that He exists and is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”***

The reason the lazy servant did not do anything with the talent entrusted to him was due to his attitude toward the master. What was the servant's excuse? *"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.'*

He wasn't just lazy; he looked at his master with contempt – slandering his lord as a cruel and greedy taskmaster. He didn't trust or respect his master. He did not have the right attitude. He did not have an attitude of gratitude. In a few days our nation will be celebrating Thanksgiving. At the heart of Thanksgiving is being grateful for the blessings you have received. When we have a thankful heart, we are recognizing the overwhelming good in our lives; and doing so gets our minds off the negative and the bad in life and points us to the giver of all good gifts – the Lord God Almighty! To be a good steward is to remember the source of all that is good.

USE IT OR LOSE IT!

Second, there is an old saying, *"Use it or lose it."* This typically was used referring to building muscle and strength and stamina in the athletic world. But it actually is a universal principle. If you don't use your mind, your talents, the skills you acquired, even your money by investing, you will slowly lose what you already have. This is equally true in the spiritual realm. God expects us to use what He has given us – spiritual wisdom in conjunction with tangible assets and relationships because that is how we show forth His love. To show forth love is something we need to do every day. We do that by using our spirit, mind and body, the skills, talent and treasure we have for His purposes.

In our parable, the only servant who gave an excuse for his performance was the person who did nothing. And usually it seems that the only people in life who make excuses are the "do nothings." I find it interesting that when Jesus asked the two faithful servants what they did with their talents, they simply said, "we took the talents you gave us, and made more talents beside."

But the unfaithful servant took forty-three words to say basically "I did nothing." He buried his talent. He didn't even put it in the bank; he didn't even try to draw any interest. Now he could have. The ancient Roman Empire had a banking system that was in many respects like those banks of today, and the interest earned on deposits was about six percent. But he didn't do even that; he simply buried his talent. The truth is I see buried talent everywhere. I see buried talent of singing, buried talent of teaching, buried talent of serving, buried talent of working, and so forth. And I hear excuses like, "I'm too busy"; "I don't have time"; "I am afraid to get involved." But there is no excuse for not being a good steward, of not serving God.

IS MY USE OF GOD'S GIFTS GLORIFYING HIM AND HELPING OTHERS?

And that leads us to the third point; we must ask ourselves to what end are we going to use the things that God has given us? What is the purpose of His gifts? To hide them, to keep them to ourselves? No! We have been given God's gifts and blessings to bless others, to build others up, to point others to Christ. In other words, we need to ask, "How is what I have glorifying God and bettering the lives of others?"

If you are a Christian you ought to be a servant doing something for God, and a steward being faithful in using the gift that God has given you for His glory – which is to point others to Christ and to love them. The only one of these servants who gave an excuse for his performance was the person who did nothing. You know I am convinced the only people in life who make excuses are the "do nothings." But not those who do their work as unto the Lord!

A GREAT REWARD

And what will result of such stewardship? There will be a great reward!

The ultimate reward in all of this is to simply hear the Master commend you for what you have done. I heard about a man eating in a restaurant who was furious when his steak was brought to the table and it was too rare. All red in the face he said, "Waiter, didn't you hear me say, 'Well done'?" The compliment of all compliments is to stand before the God who made you, and the God who gifted you, whether you are a ten, five or one talent man, and hear Him simply say, ***"Well done, you good and faithful servant."***

And so I ask all those who claim to know Christ as your Lord and Savior this question: Did Jesus make a good investment when He saved you? You see, as long as you live God wants you to be faithful with what you have, and faithful where you are. That's why Jesus Himself says, ***"He who is faithful in little, will be faithful in that which is much."*** (Lk. 16:10)

Look at your hands, look at your heart, realize everything you have is a gift of God to be used for His glory, and your gain. Whatever gifts you have, *use them, don't lose them!* In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!