

Matthew 25:14-30



“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.

So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.



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Three Congregations

It happened one day that Jesus approached the members of three of his congregations and said, "I must go away on a journey, for I have other congregations I need to help. I'm going to be away for a long time, but I expect you to make an accounting of what you have accomplished when I return. You are in a good situation to help yourselves.

This is your mission statement: to welcome, to love, and to accept ALL People as God, loves, welcomes and accepts all people! By our participation in the life of the Church, Christ's body, we grow spiritually and are empowered to live our faith.

Jesus went away and the three churches went about their business of being faithful to Jesus' instructions.

The first group decided to play it safe. They wanted to make sure that when Jesus returned everyone who was a current member was happy and still attending the church. They realized that change was hard and that by going out and bringing in new members the church would have to change. And they knew change is risky.

Oh, they would welcome people, but only people who fit the current demographic of the church or who wouldn't demand that the church change to suit needs other than what already happened to be needs of current church members. They didn't want to risk resources that the church needed to continue to do the things it long had been doing for its members.

The second group decided to take a few chances to help grow the church. They wanted to make sure that when Jesus returned that there would be a more diverse congregation than when he left. The community around the church, one to five miles away was growing more diverse. There were Asians, Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans living within this radius of the church. There were people who demonstrated a wide variety of lifestyles. There were couples living out of wedlock, some with children, there were people who were Gay and Lesbian, there were people receiving public assistance, and there were some who were struggling with alcohol and other drugs and illnesses like HIV illness. They decided, of course, that they would welcome everyone who came to their door, but they would not go out of their way to invite people who were obviously ignoring God's law, living in sin, not pulling their own weight, or had chosen lifestyles and activities not pleasing to God. They knew that change was risky and they would manage the change by being careful about those they invited to participate in their church.

The third church decided that they would extend radical hospitality to all of the people living within a ten mile radius of the church. They would cast a wide net and value every person caught within their net as a person of infinite worth made in the image of God. They would love everyone and seek to engage each person in a relationship with God and a life that led to wholeness, focusing on the worth of the person to God, rather than the flaws of that person.

They knew that they would lose people by their radical embrace of all God's children including the lost, but they thought that it was worth the risk that more of God's children would be saved by their approach. They concluded that it would be risky to not invite and welcome everyone.

When Jesus was returned he stopped in all three churches.

He was pleased to see everyone in the church that sought to stay the same. It had lost some members to death and relocation because of age, sickness, graduation, and economic realities. It had gained some members that had moved into the community and fit well into the demographic profile of the congregation and the community living within one mile of the church. This certainly was a good group of people and Jesus appreciated every one of them.

He was also pleased to see everyone in the church that sought reach out to the racial-ethnic groups that lived both in their immediate community and out five miles from their church. This church had grown much more diverse, adding people of various Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Native American cultures. It had lost a few people who felt more comfortable in a church that was more homogeneous. Jesus appreciated how the church had celebrated the cultural and language differences these new people brought to them and how the life of the church was enriched by this newfound diversity. He applauded them saying that the congregation now approximated better the diversity in heaven.

And he was pleased to see everyone in the church that sought to reach out radically and unconditionally to both the racial-ethnic groups that the second church reached out to and to the groups of people whose lifestyles were dissimilar with most everyone who had grown up or been long-term members of the church. He was sad to see that some had left this church over the differences, some the cultural differences, some the lifestyle and sin issues. He had been to many churches but he had not seen so many unmarried couples and parents, Gays and Lesbians, people on public assistance, recovering and struggling alcoholics and addicts, persons with piercings and tattoos, and people with HIV-illness. He was amazed at how the congregation united despite differences in culture, language and lifestyle.

And all these people, saints and sinners were engage together in a process of relationship, forgiveness, love and transformation.

Jesus called all three congregations together and said "I love you all. You are all children of God, brothers and sisters with the same Parent. I appreciate all of your faithfulness in striving to do what I have asked of you. I know that it is not easy. I know that you have fears that you will do the wrong thing. Anything you do, including doing nothing is a risk.

I want each one of you to love one another just like you love me and to struggle, if necessary, to grow. I want you to love your neighbors as yourself, and that

includes those in other churches, and no church at all, or in other faiths. And in the end people will know that you are my disciples by your love.”