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Matthew 25:14-30
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Faithfulness

Boy am I glad to have this election season behind us! Whether or not our candidate won is beside the point. We now have a new president and our duty is to pray that they would be faithful to the promises they made to support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America, so help them God.

But promises made without follow through are empty. And no matter how much our politicians promise to do one thing, they will undoubtedly fail to follow through on some of them. Before we throw stones, let us first consider how we ourselves have fallen short on promises that we have made. Whether to our families, our spouses, our jobs, our churches, our communities, the world, and to God.

Paul's letter to the Romans says that "We all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God."¹ Jesus said, none of us have the right to cast any stones.²

Today, we are going to talk about the fruit of the spirit known as faithfulness. To begin, I'd thought we'd hear a parable that Jesus taught his disciples. This is a well known parable, we've heard it many times, but my hope is that we would look at through the lens of God's faithfulness and not our faithlessness.

I'll be reading from Matthew 25:14-30. This is Jesus' Parable of the Talents.

14 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. **15** To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. **16** The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. **17** So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. **18** But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. **20** The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'

¹ Romans 3:23

² John 8:1-11

21 “His master replied, ‘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!’

22 “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

23 “His master replied, ‘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!’

24 “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘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 gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

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.

28 ““So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. **29** For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. **30** And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

This morning we are going to look at this parable in more depth. We’ll consider the parable proper or context in which it was told. Then we’ll look at the players in the parable and what it teaches us about faithfulness. And then we will ask how God is calling us to cultivate this fruit of faithfulness more in our lives today.

So first the parable proper. What I mean about this is where is parable located in scripture and the story of Jesus’ ministry. It comes at the end of Matthew’s gospel toward the conclusion of Jesus’ public ministry. Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives when his disciples came to him privately and asked him some questions.

He talked about the end of times and how no-one, not even he, would know the day or the time of his returning. But that they were to be ready. Then he launched in a series three parables including The Parable of the Ten Virgins, The Parable of the Talents, and The Parable of the Sheep and Goats. Each of these highlight the importance of being faithful with what they had been in charge of

before the Master or Bridegroom returned. After Jesus told these, Passover would be just two days away when he would be anointed, arrested, and then crucified.

In the parable, there is the master of the household who was going away on a journey. We don't know how long that journey would be. But it was long enough to feel like he needed to entrust portions of his estate in the care of particular servants. To one servant he gave five talents. To another he gave two talents. And to another he gave one talent. A talent back in that day was the equivalent of twenty years wages. So to put it into perspective, one hundred years wages, forty years wages, and twenty years wages respectively. A lot of money!

The first two servants immediately went out, put that money to work, and doubled what they had been given, collecting two hundred years and eighty years wages respectively. But the third servant did nothing with his portion except protect it until his master returned.

Let's consider the master. He must have known the financial acuity of each of his servants. Notice how he didn't give equal amounts to them, but expected equal faithfulness in return. Based on the third servant's excuses when his master returned, I think we can see that the master had habit of leaving his estate in other's hands while he was gone for long periods of time. Hence the servant's judgement, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed." In other words, "Why should I work for you? You didn't physically do anything make this money but relied on the rest of us to do it for you. And then you come waltzing back here expecting me to make you rich off of my blood, sweat, and tears? Forget you. Take your money, do it yourself."

Now I don't know about you but that is not the attitude that anyone wants to hear from someone who works for you. The reason we hire people in the first place is because there is more work that needs to be done than we can do on our own. We must rely and trust others to help us get done what we cannot do alone.

Now let's consider the first two servants, they went out at once and put the money they had been entrusted with to work. We even get this sense that they were pleased to do this for their master. They took risks. Calculated risks mind you. They could have easily made poor financial decisions and lost it all. But they didn't. They made wise profitable decisions with the money.

Thomas Trask and Wayde Goodall in *The Fruit of the Spirit, Becoming the Person God Wants You to Be*, write "When by faith we use the talent God has given us, care for it, and work at it, we will get better and be given more. That will never be taken away from us. People who practice get better. If however, we decide not to be faithful with our God-given talents, they will be taken from us."³

³ Thomas E. Trask and Wayde I. Goodall, *The Fruit of the Spirit, Becoming the Person God Wants You to Be* (Nashville: Emanate Books, 2000), 127.

These two servants took what they knew, and got better and better at it, multiplying their investments many times over. We can just imagine the pride they each must have had when the master unexpectedly returned and called them in to report their results. “Master, you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.” “Master, you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.”

The Greek word for entrusted is *paradidomi*. It means to surrender, intrust, yield up. It seems to imply as sense of giving over, to be in another person’s care. Total trust and vulnerability.

Then notice the master’s response to each of these servants. It’s exactly the same. He replied, “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 Greek word for faithful is *pistos*. It means trustworthy, believable, or true. We get this sense that this little assignment was a test for whether or not the master could entrust them with even more things down the road.

Author Christopher Wright in *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit, Growing in Christlikeness* writes, “On the one hand, being faithful means being trustworthy and dependable. A faithful person is a person of honesty and integrity, someone you can rely on. Faithful people keep their word. They do what they promise. They can be trusted not to cheat or deceive.

On the other hand, being faithful means exercising that kind of trustworthy behavior over a long period of time. Faithful people have proved that they can be trusted for the long haul. You don’t have to check up on them. You don’t have to worry that, even if they did a good job last week, they might let you down this week. No, faithful people show that they are routinely dependable in all kinds of ways and all kinds of circumstances. Faithfulness is the character of somebody you know you can simply rely on all the time.”⁴

I love looking up at the sky at night when I am at the beach or out hiking... someplace where there is little light pollution and you can see the stars. I can always orient myself of where I am in the universe or on earth by finding the North Star. The North Star’s position never changes. It is always in the same location. It can guide me to where I want to go. But imagine basing our sense of direction on something like a shooting star that was unpredictable and never constant.⁵ It would be impossible. The North Star is faithful. Shooting stars are not.

⁴ Christopher J Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit, Growing in Christlikeness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2017), 113.

⁵ Trask and Goodall, *The Fruit of the Spirit*, 117.

Author and pastor Eugene Peterson said, “Faithfulness is a long obedience in the same direction.”⁶

These first two servants were ones that the master could rely on to watch over his estate in his absence, long or short. They would make sure that his estate would be headed in a good and right direction while he was gone.

Notice the master’s joy in the work that the servants produced. “Come and share your master’s happiness.” The Greek word for happiness is *chara*. It means gladness, joy, or cheerfulness. They got to participate in the joy that the master experienced.

Isn’t that so true when we’ve done a good job on something that people recognize us? Especially when we’ve worked so hard to produce a certain result. It’s not easy when people don’t say anything. Now I don’t think the servants were doing this because they wanted the praise from the master. But just that was their character to work hard and not be lazy. The entering into the reward of the master’s joy was just the cherry on top!

And then we get to the servant who did not do anything with the master’s money. Before he was even given any money he had a negative perspective of the master’s nature. He judged him to be a “hard man, harvesting where he had not sown and gathering where he had not scattered seed.” For some reason he was afraid of his master. Fear is never a good basis for making good decisions.

Notice the master’s response. “You wicked, lazy servant.”

The Greek word for wicked is *ponero*. It means evil, grievous, or derelict. We get the sense that it is describing someone who willfully disregards their duties with the intent of doing harm to their boss and the property they’ve been entrusted with.

The Greek word for lazy is *okeneros*. It means lazy, slothful, or tardy. Knowing what needs to be done but then choosing to ignore it.

And then the master threw the servants judgmental words back upon him. You see the servant had wrongfully assumed certain things about his master’s character. He assumed he was hard. Judgmental. Had unrealistic expectations of those who worked for him. And that he’d be wrathful if the servant didn’t produce. None of which was true at all.

It wasn’t the servant’s lack of productivity that angered the master. It was his wrongful judgment that prevented him from even wanting to try to serve his master well.

Ok so lets think about who is who in the parable. I think the master is Jesus himself. The Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Colossians tells us tell us that Jesus

⁶ Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit*, 124.

is the creator and sustainer of all things.⁷ He is the one who has entrusted all things in his kingdom to his followers. Jesus had also just told his disciples that he was going away and that he would return one day. He didn't know when that would be, but they would need to be ready to give an account for all that they had been entrusted.

We are his servants who have been entrusted with valuable aspects of his kingdom. More than money, I'm talking about the preciousness of the gospel itself. How are we doing with investing in Jesus' kingdom? Are we putting what we know to work, multiplying what we've been given? Or are we burying the knowledge of God's goodness, grace, and love? Or are we generously giving out those gifts to the world around us?

"God's kingdom is organized in such a way that if we are faithful in the small things, we will be given more responsibility."⁸

Remember, God doesn't expect success. God expects faithfulness. God just wants us to give it our best shot, trusting God with the results. God knows that we are going to fall short in our efforts. But scripture reminds us that if we confess our shortcomings to God, that Jesus will be faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.⁹ Even when we are faithless, Jesus will remain faithful.¹⁰

"One day when we meet him face-to-face will not be judged on our success, our educational achievements, or even on all that we have been given. We will be judged on how faithful we were to all that God asked us to do. You and I want to hear the beautiful words, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'"¹¹

So how then we cultivate this fruit of faithfulness in our lives?

We need to keep our commitments that we've made. Commitments to our spouses, our children, our parents, our friends, our neighbors, our churches, our employers, our community, our country, our world, and to God.

In the Old Testament times keeping commitments were extremely serious. When two people made a covenant with one another they would take an animal, cut in two, and walk between the two halves, as if to say, "May we be like this animal cut in two if we ever break the break our promises we've made this day."

Imagine how much better our world would be if we took our promises that seriously.

⁷ Colossians 1:15-17

⁸ Trask and Goodall, *The Fruit of the Spirit*, 121.

⁹ 1 John 1:8-9

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 2:13

¹¹ Trask and Goodall, *The Fruit of the Spirit*, 118.

But again, we need to realize that sometimes we fall short and we break our promises.

We need to ask God to forgiveness.

We need to forgive others.

We may even need to forgive ourselves.

And thank God that the Bible gives us imperfect people who did great things for God that we can relate to. The Apostle Paul, though he persecuted God's people, followers of Jesus in the Church early on. He went on to do great things for God, faithfully living out his calling as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Who at the end of his life professed...

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."¹²

Those are the words of someone who wasn't perfect. But someone who was faithful.

Let me close with the story of the song that we will sing at the end of today's service.

Thomas Chisholm was a intelligent and ambitious young poet from Kentucky who met Christ at age twenty seven. In 1903, he chose to focus that ambition on serving Christ as a Methodist minister. But the years and stresses of ministry took a toll on his health. By 1909, after many hospital visits, he had to leave the ministry which gave him more time to focus on his poetry.

Eventually he became an insurance agent in order to financially support his wife and two daughters. But he continued to prolifically write over 1200 poems. No matter the struggle, Chisholm always chose to focus on God's faithfulness. As a result, in 1923 Chisholm wrote a poem that he called "Faithfulness" based on the words from Lamentations 3:23.

Later composer William Runyan put the poem to music which became the much loved hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness." Chisholm also wrote Blessed Assurance, Christ Arose, Crown Him With Many Crowns, Jesus Paid It All, and Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!

That is faithfulness. Chisholm could have buried his talents in bitterness that things didn't turn out in his serving God as he expected, but instead he chose to use the talents he had and put them to work investing in God's kingdom. And we continue to be blessed by his faithfulness even today.

So may we focus on God's faithfulness when times seem bleak. May we cultivate this fruit of faithfulness in our own lives by the power of the Holy Spirit

¹² 2 Timothy 4:7-8

living in us. May we trust in Jesus when we fall short, knowing the he will continue to be faithful despite our faithlessness. And may we long to hear “Well done good and faithful servant. Come and share in your master’s happiness.”

Amen.

“Forgive us now, Father, as we humble ourselves before you knowing that we have been unable to live up to the standards you place before us. Have mercy on us. We’re grateful for the work of your son, Jesus Christ, and that through him we are acceptable in your eyes. Flood our hearts with your love and hope. Give us the desire and ability to walk the path you place before us, keeping the faith with you, Father, and with our families and friends.” Amen.