

Fruitfulness

Matthew 25:14-30

For most of history Christians have been persecuted for their faith. Jesus' life and message was so threatening to the leadership of Israel that they had Him executed, hoping to be done with Him. But then the Father raised Him up and poured the Holy Spirit out on the church. The disciples proclaimed the same world-transforming gospel and eleven of them died as martyrs (John finished his days in exile), expanding the kingdom even further. In the Olivet Discourse Jesus prepares His people for the tribulation and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by teaching them how to be fruitful in the meantime while the master is away. They did not bury their talents but invested them to great profit and entered into joy of their Lord. We ought to be fruitful in hard times because we've been faithful in easy times.

Overview of the Text

Like the parable of the good and evil servants, and the wise and foolish virgins (24:45-25:13), this parable includes the element of absence and delay, when the master travels to a far country (v. 14). First, he delivers his goods to three servants: five to the first, two to the second, and one to the third, each according to his ability (v. 15). A talent is a weight of currency equal to 6000 denarii, 20 years' wages for a day laborer amounting to upwards of a million dollars. The first two servants trade and double their investment, but the third buries his in the ground (vv. 16-19). When the master returns, he says to each of the first two, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (vv. 21-23). The third servant reports that he knew his master was a hard man, reaping where he didn't sow, gathering where he didn't plant, and therefore out of fear he hid the talent so he could give it back (vv. 24-25). The master calls him wicked and lazy because knowing what he just confessed, he should have at least put the money in the bank and gained interest (vv. 26-27). The master takes his talent and gives it to him who has ten, saying to those who have, more will be given, and those who lack will have what little they have taken away (vv. 28-29). He orders the servant to be cast into outer darkness where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth (v. 30).

Talented

This Discourse begins when the disciples ask when the stones of the temple will be thrown down, and what will be signs of Jesus' coming and the end of the age (24:3). He warns them not to be deceived by false Christ's and various crises, but once they are violently persecuted, then to leave Judea (24:4-16). He says the sun, moon, and stars will go dark and fall just like Isaiah prophesied would happen to Babylon (which came to pass in 539 BC), and all of this would take place within a generation (24:29, 35; Is. 13:9-10). Still, no one knew when within that generation it would take place so Jesus gives three parables describing how things will feel normal and non-urgent, but they must stay alert. Some servants will get drunk and beat the other servants, and some bridesmaids will not light the way for the bridegroom because they don't really know him (24:49; 25:12). Is Jesus changing the subject, and does the "long time" mean the years after 70 AD before His final return? There's no reason to think so, and the destination of talent burier is like that of the wicked servant (24:51; 25:30). As always, Scripture applies everywhere and at all times, but this is about what the church will do before Jesus comes in judgment on Jerusalem. He doesn't drop millions of dollars on the apostles, but He entrusts them with the gospel of grace. This is *like* being invested with millions, only that the gospel is priceless. If they sell everything and buy it, if they seek the kingdom first, if they invest these talents while the master is away, they will double, and they'll enter into the joy of their Lord. The disciples did this and the New Testament is the record of how it went (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14, 28; 6:7; Heb.

Fruitfulness

Matthew 25:14-30

10:25). The word “talent” has come to mean gifted, skilled, possessing naturally ability. But the talent Jesus describes here is the gospel given to the church. Our job is to believe and obey, to tell the world the good news of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians is that they would know who they are in Christ (Eph. 1:15-23). Once you know the God and Father of Jesus Christ, what He did and what it means for this world, you can’t wait to invest the talents. We don’t earn these, but each possesses the gospel in fulness and according to his ability does something with it.

Unconservative

Conservatives are described by their desire to conserve, to keep the thing they have. All Christians are called to be faithful to what God has given them: “Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind” (Phil. 3:15-16). But it’s not enough to conserve or not backslide: “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus: (Phil. 3:13-14). We are progressive, knowing that Jesus is reigning at the right hand of God until all His enemies are made His footstool. Progress is happening and inevitable. We want to see new Christians, new churches, new families, more children, more maturity, greater faithfulness, greater dominion, less crime and injustice, less poverty, fewer bureaucrats, and all of this completely driven by faith in God and glad-hearted devotion to Him, His word, and His people. So conservative how? The conservative in this parable buries his talent. The investing servants double their talents over a long time. They’re not rash or greedy, but they want to turn a profit for their master and must therefore take risks. Godliness is risky. Getting married, having kids, discipling those kids to be arrows shot against enemies (Ps. 127:4-5), starting businesses, loving strangers, showing hospitality, speaking the truth in love, preaching the gospel, planting churches, all of it is risky. This might mean hardship and suffering in the short term, but that’s okay because joy awaits.

More Will Be Given

But being aggressive with the talents God has given us isn’t the only risk. It seems like the riskiest, but everything has a cost, including the opportunity cost of doing nothing. The servant buries his talent because he thinks the master is a hard man, reaping where he didn’t sow and gathering where he didn’t scatter (v. 24). This makes the master sound harsh, demanding, and greedy—look at him, always wanting more! Fear never brings clarity, which why you must bring your fears into the light (v. 25). The master points out that even the servant doesn’t really believe his own lies; if he did, he’d have invested the talent. The servant sounds like Adam: “The woman whom You gave to be with me [Your fault I was with her], she gave me of the tree [some helper], and I ate [what else could I have done?]]” (Gen. 3:12). In order to sin, you have to believe lies about God, and in order bury talents, to believe a lot of them. If you put anything ahead of following Christ, there’s some lie you’ve believed, some way you think you can be blessed apart from Him. Because all blessings come from Him, the one who invests in His kingdom will be blessed with more. Jesus isn’t robbing the poor (vv. 29-30). It’s the opposite. He stopping those who rob from the poor to continue doing so. His servants will turn a profit on the talents He has given and more will be given as a result. Be planted in Christ and fruitful like a tree.

Fruitfulness

Matthew 25:14-30