Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 28) – November 15, 2026

“[26] 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? [27] 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. [28] So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. [29] For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.
[30] And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

- Matthew 25:26-30 –

The parable of the talents is not about works-righteous, but about the way a gospel transformed heart naturally does good works. It makes this point by contrast with an untransformed heart.

A master goes on a journey and entrusts his three servants with great wealth. To them he gives five talents, two talents, and one talent, respectively. Since he gives them different amounts of wealth, the talents do not represent saving grace which would be the same for each. Rather, they represent the different gifts, abilities, and opportunities for kingdom work that each person has.

While the master is on his journey, the servant with five talents earns five more, and the servant with two talents earns two more. However, the one with a single talent simply buries the money in the ground. After a long time, the master returns to settle accounts. Here we see that the master is Jesus and that the time frame of the parable is the period between Jesus’ ascension and his second coming in judgment. This is the time for kingdom work (investing talents).

When the servants speak to their master, the difference between the first two and the third is striking. The first two say, “Master, you have delivered to me five (two) talents, here I have made five (two) talents more.” To these the master responds, “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.” However, the third servant says, “Master, I know you to be a hard man . . ., so I was afraid and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.” This last servant is then rebuked and cast into outer darkness.

The primary difference between the servants is not their works (a surface issue) but rather the different conditions of their hearts lying at the base of their works (the root issue). Because the first two servants have hearts transformed by the gospel, they love their master, trust his character, and work in confidence. By contrast, the third servant has not been transformed by the gospel and therefore hates his master, distorts his character, and is paralyzed by fear. His bad works therefore reveal his bad faith for which he is judged. (On the opposition between love and fear see 1 John 4:17-19.)

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