

TITLE: "God's Trustworthy and Worthless Slaves"

TEXT: Matthew 25:14-30 (NT pp. 28, 29)

In today's terms, a talent would have been equal to \$347,800, an unimaginable amount, just as a million dollars would be to us here this morning. Jesus says:

"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 [million dollars], to another two [million], to another one [million], to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ...The one who had received the five [million dollars], went off at once and traded with them, and made five more [million dollars]. In the same way, the one who had the two [million dollars] made two more [million]. But the one who had received the one [million dollars] 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 [million dollars] came forward, bringing five more [million], saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five [million dollars]; see, I have made five more [million].' 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 [million dollars] also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two [million]; see, I have made two more [million].' 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 [million dollars] also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, [harvesting] where you did not [plant], 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 [harvested] where I did not [plant], 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 [million dollars] from him, and give it to the one with the ten [million]. 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.'

## Introduction – What entrance to heaven will really be like

A couple from southern California were planning to get married, but just before the big day, they were swallowed in a mudslide. Next thing they knew they were standing before God at the gates of heaven. They asked God if they could still get married. God said there was no marriage in heaven, but he would see what he could do about getting a service together prior to their entry.

A day passed, then another. Finally, after a week of waiting, God appeared followed by a minister. “Now you can get married,” God said.

The couple thanked him, but explained that over their week long wait they had talked and thought it would be a good idea to have a prenuptial agreement. At this God said, “Listen, it took me the better part of week to find a minister up here, how long do think it would take me to find a lawyer?”

There is a LOT of confusion about what meeting God will be like. Jesus KNOWS what it will be like because he has BEEN to heaven and God is his Father. The reason Jesus TELLS us this parable, is to PREPARE us for our future meeting with God, so in a sense this parable is like a study guide for the Big Final.

### 1. What is God actually like

I have heard a LOT of different views of God. If I put them on a spectrum, on one end would be those who imagine God to be ALL ABSOLUTE TRUTH, ALL RULES, AND NO LOVE. One very cynical person with this view said, “God is the One who looks for people having fun and then condemns them.” Another said, “If you keep God’s rules, you go to heaven. If you don’t, you go to hell.”

On the other end of the spectrum are those who believe God to be ALL LOVE, AND NO RULES, NO ABSOLUTE TRUTH. Several people with this view have told me, “I won’t believe in a God who would allow a hell.” Others say that EVERYone will go to heaven.

If God is ALL TRUTH, ALL RULES, AND NO LOVE, we are ALL going to be in trouble. Why? Because NO one can keep the rules. Jesus says that if you hate someone in your heart, you have committed murder, and if you lust in your heart you have already committed adultery. Since God knows our thoughts as well as our actions, there will be no one who is without sin; except of course Jesus.

Nor can God be ALL LOVE AND NO RULES. Why? Because each and every person would make up his or her rules and not many of them would reflect God's truth.

So, if God is NOT ALL TRUTH or ALL LOVE, what IS God like? Let me tell you a story. Those who have hiked up to Taughannock Falls know that at the end of the trail you are surrounded by rock cliffs hundreds of feet high out of which flows a beautiful 190 foot waterfall. It is a natural amphitheater of majestic proportions.

Hikers can not actually walk up to the pool below the falls, or to the base of the cliffs around the pool, because it is dangerous. Rocks fall off the cliff faces all the time and after falling a hundred feet or so, they can make a pretty good impression. So, there is a knee high wall and clearly legible signs that tell people to STAY INSIDE the wall because of the falling rocks.

A few years ago, a couple ignored the signs and took their two children over the wall. They spread out a picnic at the base of a cliff and rocks DID fall off the cliff face. Unfortunately the father and one child were killed.

I'm sure those parents loved their children. However, there IS a reason for rules, and a good parent maintains a balance of unconditional love AND rules that preserve their child's life and health. That is the way God is. God has unconditional love and God also has rules for our life and health. And, in the end, it is going to be love as GOD defines it, and rules as GOD defines them, by which you, and I, will be judged.

### 1. The worthless slave

In this morning's text, there are three people: two do what is right and one what is wrong in God's sight. I begin with the latter to get him out of the way.

Listen to this part of the parable: "Then the one who had received the one [million dollars] also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, [harvesting] where you did not [plant], 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.'"

What sort of person was he?

First of all, he hated and mistrusted his master. Because of this, he misjudged his master and assumed that his master was out to take advantage of him when, in fact, his master wanted him to succeed so that he could be rewarded.

This slave was also angry and resentful. The reason he would not even invest the money his master gave him was because he was not going to get anything out of it. He was a slave. Anything he made would belong to his master, so he refused to use what he had been given because the interest wouldn't end up in his pocket.

This is a parable. A parable is a story that makes a point. The point Jesus is making is NOT about a particular master and slaves. Nor is the point about money. The POINT is that each person IS a slave of God. We are not servants because God does not pay us with money. We are slaves whether we know it or not because God MADE us, God OWNS us and God will decide where we will be living a thousand years from today.

But each of us HAS free will. God gives each and every one of his slaves gifts, talents and abilities that God intends us to use for the work that GOD is doing here on earth. In fact, according to the parable, God expects us to develop our gifts so that they can be even MORE useful. However, we can CHOOSE to use them for God or not.

What if you don't? What if, like the lazy slave, you hate and mistrust God? What if you are angry and resentful and refuse to use God's gifts for God's service. What if you intentionally squelch your abilities and talents so that they absolutely can NOT be used by God or anyone else? ...Then you would not WANT to go to heaven.

Our eternal life will be a reflection of our earthly life. If you hate God and want to frustrate God's plans, then God will allow you to continue to do so. Jesus says: "As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." This guy was weeping and gnashing his teeth while he was here on earth and if he wants that for eternity, God WILL grant that wish. Whether he will think it was good decision in a million years remains to be seen.

## 2. The trustworthy slaves

Let us look at the trustworthy slaves, who developed the gifts, abilities and talents God gave them so they can do even MORE of God's work.

The text does not say they always enjoyed their work, that they didn't have to make sacrifices in order to carry out their work or that they got anything for themselves out of it until the end. So why DID they do all this work for their Master?

To please God. ... The first question of the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Confession is; "What is the chief and highest end of humanity?" ...The answer? ..."[A person's] chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully enjoy God forever."

One of my greatest revelations has been that it is enough to please God. It may surprise you to know that there are some mornings I wake up and there is nothing of all I have to do that I am looking forward to doing that day. Some WEEKS are like that. How do I get myself up and going? I do it because I know, I KNOW, that it pleases God. And the STRANGE part about it is that when I know I please God, it makes me happy. The same will be true for you.

It PLEASES God when we come together like this to worship the Lord.

It PLEASES God when you pray.

It PLEASES God for you read the Bible and apply God's word to your life.

It PLEASES God when you help the poor and needy here and throughout the world.

It PLEASES God when you use the abilities God gave you to do the work of the church.

And I want to say THANK YOU to each and every one here who is DOING the work of God in our church. ...If you are NOT currently involved in God's work, there are LOTS of jobs that need to be done; such as:

- Teaching the prekindergarten class for a month;
- Wearing work clothes to church on November 7<sup>th</sup> and raking leaves;
- Signing up to chair or help with an after church coffee;
- Making a pledge to support or church next month;
- Serving as a Deacon (we still have one opening);
- Joining our church family;
- Singing in the choir;
- Signing up to serve as an Usher or greeter; or
- Writing out a check to help the poor flood victims in Pakistan.

Conclusion – It WILL be worth it

I am NOT saying that these or any church work will always be easy, convenient or fun. But I WILL say that, someday, it WILL be worth it. When? When you meet the Lord face to face, and you WILL, and when God lovingly looks into your eyes and says: "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, THEN, you will KNOW your work for the Lord was worth it. And it WILL be worth it forever and ever and ever. ...Amen.

Talent: A drachma was the coin usually paid for a day's laborer. There were 6,000 drachmas in a talent. In today's terms (using the minimum wage of \$7.25/hour and a 40 hour week) that would translate into \$347,800.00 (23.5 years at \$14,800/year).

*The Number One Lady's Detective Agency* is the first of a series of books by Alexander McCall Smith. The books chronicle the life of Mma Ramotswe, who is the first lady detective in Botswana, Africa. Botswana is the country just north of South Africa. These are delightful books and in the second one, titled *Tears of the Giraffe*, we get a taste of Mma Ramotswe's theology:

In Mma Ramotswe's view there was a God, *Modimo*, who lived in the sky, more or less directly above Africa. God was extremely understanding, particularly of people like herself, but to break the rules, as so many people did with complete disregard, was to invite retribution. When they died, good people, such as Mma Ramotswe's father, Obed Ramotswe, were undoubtedly welcomed by God. The fate of the others was unclear, but they were sent to some terrible place—perhaps a bit like Nigeria, she thought—and when they acknowledged their wrongdoing they would be forgiven (pp. 7, 8).

Nor can God be ALL LOVE AND NO RULES. Why? Mma Ramotswe and her secretary Grace Makutsi, who had recently been promoted to associate detective, see why:

Mma Makutsi said to Mma Romotswe: "But there are times, surely, when a lie is a good thing. What if a murderer came to your house and asked you where a certain person was? And what if you knew where that person was, would it be wrong to say: 'I do not know anything about that person. I do not know where he is.' Would that not be a lie?"

Mma Romotswe said: "Yes. But then you have no duty to tell the truth to a murderer. So you can lie to him. But you do have a duty to tell the truth to your client, to your spouse, or to the police. That is all different."

[Mma Makutsi] "Why? Surely if it is wrong to lie. Then it is always wrong to lie. If people could lie when they thought it was the right thing to do, then we could never tell when they meant it." Mma Makutsi stopped and pondered for a few moments before continuing. "One person's idea of what is right may be quite different from another's. If each person can make up his own rule..." She shrugged, leaving the consequences unspoken.

"Yes," said Mma Ramotswe. "You are right about that. That's the trouble with the world these days. Everybody thinks that they can make their OWN decisions about what is right and wrong." (pp. 177-178)

On the Lord's return:

If the Lord came back today, he would probably be a mechanic, [Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni] reflected. That would be a great honour for mechanics everywhere. And there is no doubt but that he would choose Africa.: Israel was far too dangerous these days. In fact, the more one thought about it, the more likely it was that he would choose Botswana, and Gaborone in particular. Now that would be a wonderful honour for the people of Botswana; but it would not happen, and there was no point in thinking about it further. The Lord was not going to come back; we had our chance and we had not made very much out of it, unfortunately. (p. 153)