

LESSON 3

So...Where Do I Come In?

Even if you haven't been reading very thoroughly, you should have discovered by now that God is the owner of everything, and He is sovereign over everything. Is there anything left? Is there any room for you and me? As a matter of fact, and it should come as no surprise, He included us in His master plan -- He needed managers of all that He owns. And that is precisely where we enter the picture. The Sunday morning term for a manager is a steward. The word isn't used so much anymore, but it simply refers to a manager. I think the word "stewardship" has gotten a bad rap in the church. For years, the only time I heard the word stewardship used was when the pastor was talking about the need to meet the annual budget or the desire to build a building. That type of thinking is a distortion of the meaning of stewardship or stewards.

To put it simply, to be good at stewardship, we need to be good managers. We will discuss in detail later, but for now realize there are just a few options for us as stewards or managers of the resources that God entrusts to us: We can consume or spend them; we can maintain or hold them; we can improve or multiply them; or we can give them away for someone else to use. We can be good or bad managers in any of those options. We'll get into the practical ways to do this later, but for now, let's look and see what Jesus had to say about stewards/managers.

The parable that Jesus told in Matthew 25 is a great example of what He expects of us as managers. It is often called the "Parable of the Stewards" or the "Parable of the Talents". I encourage you to read it over several times, but allow me to paraphrase in 21st century language.

Scriptural Foundation



Jesus is telling a story of an owner or operator of a business that is preparing to leave on a journey. The owner is referred to as "master". The owner calls three of his managers to him in preparation for his departure and distributes some talents for them to manage in his absence. (A talent was a unit of weight or measure, typically silver or gold.) He doesn't give the three the same amounts. He gives five talents to one, two talents to another and to the third manager, he gives a single talent. By the way, Jesus is talking about what

you and I call "dollars and cents", not some other kind of talent. We know that because of what he says later to the third steward when the owner said the manager should have put the talent in the bank and earned interest. You don't earn interest on a musical talent, so we know this story is about managing cold hard cash.

Please notice as you read the scripture what Jesus says about the owner's distribution plan. He says, "He gave to each according to his own ability". Please think on this point for a moment. What can we take away from this teaching? I'll tell you what it says to me. This tells me that you may have more ability to manage than I do, and you might receive more to manage, or vice versa. But it also says this to me, and this is more important - **it is at God's discretion as to whom He gives what!** That is enormously freeing for me. It means that I don't have to compare myself to others who may have more (or less). Wow! I really don't have to keep up with the Jones'.



So, the owner leaves and later returns. Note what happens next. The managers report in. The owner didn't have to look for them or send the collectors after them. They must have understood that the talents they had been given belonged to the owner - they understood the ownership/stewardship principle. So, the first one reports in with 10 talents, he doubled the money. The same with the second, he doubled the money by turning two into four. Note that the owner had the same response to both, "Well done good and faithful steward. You were faithful with a little, I will put you in charge of a lot. Come and enter into the joy of your master." It made no difference that 10 was a bigger number than 4 - the owner wasn't looking at quantity; he was looking at quality of management skills!

Then the third manager reports with a different story. He thought he'd be frugal, not take any risks and turn in what he had received. As a matter of fact, he buried the talent to make sure it wouldn't disappear. Wrong approach - the owner was not impressed in the least. Look at the language the owner used when addressing this fellow: wicked and lazy! Not exactly complimentary terms. Then he takes the single (and probably dirty) talent and gives it to the first guy. The next statement is the closure. The owner says, "depart from me" -- in today's language, "get out of my face".

The Moral of the Story

So, what's the takeaway? What is Jesus saying to us? I think it's pretty clear - **He wants us to be accountable, efficient, faithful, trustworthy and maybe even industrious managing His resources.** And, if we're not, we run the risk of having some of those not so complimentary terms added to our ID card.



