

Matthew 25:14-30

Bryan McDowell

## So, You Knew, Did You?

This is a challenging text, at several levels. Luke's gospel has a similar version, with greater emphasis, I think, on Jesus' claim to Lordship, and certainly equal if not greater emphasis on a final judgment of the world. One thing that I like to do with challenging texts from the synoptic gospels, is to try to find similar lessons in the gospel of John. You good Presbyterian Bible students know that the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, are quite different from the Gospel of John. But sometimes, I find similar teachings in John's gospel even though they may appear there in very different form. I think I have found a companion text in John's gospel to go with this parable in Matthew, and its parallel in Luke. It is a saying of Jesus very typical of John's gospel, and it appears in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter. Here it is: Jesus says,

*Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit! Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

Let me explain. Before us in Matthew's text, we have the example of the first two servants in great contrast to the third. The first two servants each received their assigned tasks joyfully. They approached their assignments not so much as a huge personal responsibility, than as a joyful opportunity. They were grateful for the master's trust, they were thrilled at the opportunity to serve the master in this special way, and they had little if any fear that anything might go wrong. As a result, they took their assigned treasures, they put them to work in the community, and they both increased their assigned amounts of treasure.

The third servant, however, feared the master. This servant mistrusted the master and received the assignment with dread and cynicism. This servant was not happy at all with this assignment, and knew that the outcome was likely to be disastrous for him, or her. As a result, this servant took the portion of assigned treasure and instead of putting it to work in the community, dug a hole and buried it, as if it were some dangerous and toxic substance.

The day of reckoning came, as the gospels of Matthew and Luke both make clear, and the three servants were called to account for their assignments. The happy and grateful two servants who had invested their treasures in their communities, had both doubled the amount entrusted to them. The third servant, however, intending to simply hang on and preserve his life, such as it was, took neither risk, nor opportunity. The third servant risked nothing, gave nothing away, but did a pretty good job of protecting his reputation, his position, and his ego!

Well, we know the outcome. The two servants who made no effort to protect their reputations, who had no fear of the master, who happily invested their portion of the master's treasure in such ways and places as they could in their lives, had happy results. But the third servant, fearing the master, needing to protect his place, his role and his reputation, did not have a happy result. But, this makes sense, only if we understand that the treasure given to all three servants by the master was **love!** John's gospel got this. According to John's gospel, we are all called to abandon the fears and concerns and worries and anxieties of the ego; we are all called to claim and live fully into our place as beloved children of God; we are all called to take the great and incredible love of God poured out upon us, and with total abandon, to give it away, generously, indiscriminately, and happily, as our Lord does. Only so will we hear those

incredible words we all long to hear: well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Master!