

# Session 7

## THE REWARD FOR GOOD WORK

*Matthew 25:14-30*

### Memory Verse

*For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough. But from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.*

– MATTHEW 25:29, CSB




## The Reward for Good Work

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** God has entrusted believers with gifts and resources He expects us to use for His glory and to further His kingdom.

According to a recent survey, over half of Americans believe Jesus is literally coming back to earth one day. Many men and women say they believe Jesus will be back on earth one day, possibly even soon. And this is not limited to those who profess to be Christ followers. Around 18 percent of Americans who are members of non-Christian religions also believe in the second coming of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible speaks more about the second coming of Jesus than about His first coming. If the Bible gives the second coming that much emphasis, we need to take it seriously too. But we must go beyond mere agreement with the claim that Jesus will return. If we truly believe this promise, it will impact the way we live each day. True belief always affects the way we live.

 What might contribute to people claiming to believe Jesus will return but that supposed belief having no impact on their daily lives? What might this reveal about how they've misunderstood Jesus?



Based on the amount of attention the Bible gives to the return of Jesus, how much attention should we give this promise? How would your life look different if you remembered this truth each day?

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## Session Summary

Jesus taught spiritual lessons using parables. The parable of the talents is about a master who entrusted his valuables to his servants and expected them to manage them wisely in his absence. Three servants were given different amounts of wealth, but each was given something. The talents represented the gifts, talents, abilities, and resources the Lord has given each believer. Although each Christian receives different gifts, each receives something, and each will be held accountable for what he or she did with what was given.

We wait for our Master's return like those in the parable. As Jesus's servants, we are to make good use of the time and our resources to bring Him glory and further His kingdom.

### 1. The Assignment (Matthew 25:14-15)

Jesus often used parables to teach spiritual lessons. This parable of the talents is another Jesus used to teach about His second coming and the importance of being watchful and prepared for His return. This parable focused on the way people use what God has entrusted to them.

The talents referenced in this parable were a certain amount of money. This was no small amount of money either. One talent would have equaled six thousand days' wages for a laborer.<sup>2</sup> It was a common practice for a master to trust his servants with things that were important to him. This was a big responsibility for the servants in the owner's absence, but it was safer than other options in the ancient world. As Jesus told this parable, those listening recognized this arrangement from daily life.

**?** How have all Christians been given resources to use for God's sake? Why is this more important than any amount of money we might receive stewardship of?

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As part of this practice, it was common to divide the talents between several servants and not just give it all to one. We might compare this to the current practice of diversifying one's portfolio in the stock market. The master gave each of the servants some amount to guard and invest. Likewise, God has entrusted each of us with gifts, abilities, talents, and treasure that we are to use for His glory and His Kingdom. As we will see in this parable, what's most important is not the amount that we have been given but what we do with it. The servants received different amounts according to the discretion of the master. It is not our job to compare our gifts with others' gifts. That way of thinking feeds the wrong motivations and desires. We are only held accountable for what we receive, not what others receive.

**?** Why is unwise to compare what you have been given with what others receive? How are we prone to this in the church?

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Jesus said the master divided the talents according to the ability of each servant. The master had knowledge and insight into what the different servants could handle well. This was not a slight against anyone but spoke to the master's intimate knowledge of his servants. For this same reason, we can trust what God gives us and that He will equip us to best use the resources He's given. God does not put us in places without also equipping us for His purposes. We can always trust and rely on Him. While each servant received a different amount, each servant's amount was valuable.

**?** Application: What has God given you that He wants you to use for His glory and to further the gospel?

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## 2. The Strategy (Matthew 25:16-18)

The three men showed their commitment to the master's priorities "immediately" (v. 15). We don't know anything about the three men previously; Jesus didn't include their histories in the story because their histories didn't matter. After receiving the talents, two of them determined to spend their time devoted to their master's priorities, and one of them did not.

Scripture says the first two servants traded with their talents. The fact that they got busy in response to the master shows they felt the weight of the responsibility. They did not delay in fulfilling the task given them by their master.

 What does it say to you that the first two servants got to work immediately in response to the master's wishes?

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 How does the seriousness with which treat a task relate to the level of urgency we show in completing a task?

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How often do we respond in a similar fashion to the responsibilities that the Lord has given us? Many in the church today receive what the Lord gives but take their time responding. It is tempting to wait until the "right time" before committing to serving and using the gifts you've received, but that is not what we are called to do. If we aren't careful, we can get distracted by our circumstances or insecurities and fail to obey the Master.

This is what happened with the third servant. He took the one talent the master gave him and hid it in a hole in the ground. He did not work to grow it or use it for anything. Instead, it went into the ground because of his fear.

Think about how this same attitude looks in the church today. Some accept the gifts God has given them but fail to put them to use. The third servant acted immediately as the first two did, but his action was for his own interests and not that of his master. Every Christ follower has received gifts, and along with those gifts comes responsibility. The Lord in His wisdom and sovereignty, entrusts us with gifts, talents, abilities, and resources for His purposes and not primarily to serve our own interests.

**?** Application: Where might you have failed to use the resources God has given you to honor Him? What opportunity is there to change this today?

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### 3. The Master Returns (Matthew 25:19-30)

“After a long time” the master returned (v. 19). The exact moment of the Lord’s return is not the most important detail but the fact that the Lord’s return is certain. His servants should be watching and preparing for His return even as they continue the work He left for them. Because of the lengthy wait for Jesus’s return, it is possible for us to be deceived into believing the work He has given us is no longer important or at least no longer urgent. But nothing could be further from the truth.

**?** How could knowing the master would be gone for a long while affect the way the servants handled themselves? How does the uncertainty of when Christ will return impact us today?

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When Jesus comes back it will be a day of judgment for the world and a day of reckoning for the church. Believers will give an account for what they did with the talents entrusted to them by the Father just as the servants did in the parable, and the Lord will reward each person according to their efforts.

The first two servants took their talents and worked with the resources they had been given. Both gained more talents for their master, and both received a reward for their efforts. The master called them both good and faithful servants and blessed them with more responsibility. Notice this reward was not based on the actual number of talents the servants raised, but that they both stewarded the resources well and were faithful with what had been entrusted to them.

The third servant had not. The third servant sought to justify his behavior by appealing to the reality that the master was a harsh man. Because of this, he did nothing for fear of losing what he had been given. Instead of being justified in his action, the servant's words showed his liability for not acting as the master wished. The master called him evil and lazy, took away what he had been given, and cast the servant out of his presence.

**?** What did the master's response indicate about God's desire for His people as they await the return of Christ?

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Summing up the story, Jesus stated that those who are faithful with what they have been given will be given even more, just like the servants. The lesson of this story is for every believer. We must be ready and watching for Jesus to return and our degree of readiness will be displayed in the way we steward the resources He gave us. We will be held accountable for what we do with those resources. We can choose to respond like the first two servants and be called good and faithful. Or we can make the mistake of the third servant. We are assured that the day of reckoning will come and the choices we make today will determine how that day goes. Those who are faithful will be rewarded; those who are unfaithful will be punished. To be clear, this parable does not teach us that we earn God's favor through our works. Rather, those with a right understand of God's grace will respond by living according to His will and ways.

**?** Application: What needs to change about the way you handle the gifts God entrusted you with? How do you need to act today?


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## Conclusion

The parable of the talents has implications for the church today. In this story the master entrusted portions of his wealth to three servants to manage while he was away. Every believer has received gifts from the Father, and we are expected to manage those in a godly manner.

How we handle the gifts, talents, and resources of God is important. We are to invest our resources in such a way that God gets glory, and His kingdom is furthered. While the master was away, the first two servants went straight to work with their talents while the third hid his out of fear. Not knowing how long until the return of the master meant every minute mattered. We do not know when Jesus will return but we do know judgment will come on that day as well as a reckoning for believers. What we do as we wait has major implications.


When the master returned, the first two servants shared how they had invested and gained even more talents. They acted wisely and were found to be good and faithful. The third tried to make excuses for his failure to manage the talent he had been entrusted with. The master called him wicked and lazy and cast him away. The interaction between the master and the servants is a picture of how believers will be held accountable for the way we manage the resources we have been given.

 If you are honest, which type of servant from this parable are you most like right now? What needs to change or continue considering this reality?

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 How can we as a group keep one another accountable and encourage faithfulness to Jesus until His return?

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 How does living faithfully for Jesus until He returns give us opportunity for gospel conversations with others?

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## Here's How to Become a Christ-Follower:

*Read the following verses and ask after each one: "What does this say to me?"*

- **All have sinned:** Romans 3:23 & 1 John 1:8
- **The wages of sin:** Romans 6:23 & John 3:18
- **But while we were sinners, salvation was provided:** Romans 5:8
- **Become a Christ-follower:** Romans 10:9-10 Confess and Believe

## Accepting Christ is Just the Beginning:

Next Steps:

- Publicly profess your faith by being baptized (Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 3:21; Romans 6:4).
- Join a church which follows the Bible, where you can grow in your faith through prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other Christians.
- Get involved in groups for encouragement and accountability.
- Begin a daily personal worship experience with God where you study the Bible and pray.
- Share with others what Jesus has done for you. Tell your story (Romans 10:14; Matthew 28:19-20).
- Begin to live for God (Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; James 1:19-27).

### Prayer Prompts:

1. What talents is God calling you to use right now?
2. How can you be faithful with what God has given you and not hide it out of fear?



# FOR NEXT WEEK

## Unbroken Chain

### Main Passages

- 2 Timothy 4:1-8

### Session Outline

1. The Charge (2 Timothy 4:1-2)
2. The Need for Preaching (2 Timothy 4:3-4)
3. Fulfill Your Ministry (2 Timothy 4:5-8)

### Memorize

*For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough. But from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.*

- Matthew 25:29, CSB

### References

<sup>1</sup>Jeff Diamant, “About Four-in-Ten U.S. Adults Believe Humanity Is ‘Living in the End Times,’” Pew Research Center, December 8, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/12/08/about-four-in-ten-u-s-adults-believe-humanity-is-living-in-the-end-times/>.

<sup>2</sup>Charles L. Quarles, “Matthew,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1545.