

# The Reward for Good Work

*September 17, 2023*

## Lesson Summary

### **Main Passages**

Matthew 25:14-30

### **Session Outline**

1. The Assignment (Matthew 25:14-15)
2. The Strategy (Matthew 25:16-18)
3. The Master Returns (Matthew 25:19-30)

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### **Theological Theme**

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



## Leader Guide

# The Reward for Good Work

### Introduction

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?

### 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?

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

### Matthew 24:37–25:30

Here Jesus strung together a series of parables and metaphors to underline one central theme—believers must always be prepared for Christ's return whenever it may occur. Matthew 24:37–44 describes how it will catch many by surprise. Matthew 24:45–51 warns disciples not to assume Christ will stay away longer than He actually does. Matthew 25:1–13 warns them against assuming that He will return more quickly than He actually does. Matthew 25:14–30 teaches proper behavior however long that interval turns out to be—faithful stewardship of every resource with which we have been entrusted.


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?

## 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?

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

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?

### 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?


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?

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?

## 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?
- ❓ How can we as a group keep one another accountable and encourage faithfulness to Jesus until His return?
- ❓ How does living faithfully for Jesus until He returns give us opportunity for gospel conversations with others?

## Prayer of Response

*Thank God for the gifts and resources He has entrusted to you. Ask for wisdom on how to best use those resources so that God gets glory, and His kingdom grows.*

## Additional Resources

- *Be Loyal* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Exalting Jesus in Matthew* by David Platt
- *Matthew* by R.C. Sproul

## Disciples Multiplying Disciples



### Questions to Guide Your Group's Discussion

1. What does this passage say?
2. What did this passage mean to its original audience?
3. What does this passage tell us about God?
4. What does this passage tell us about man?
5. What does this passage demand of me?
6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (*How can you use this information this week at work or with friends and neighbors?*)
7. How does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

\*Adapted from Seven Arrows by Matt Rogers pastor of The Church at Cherrydale, Greenville, SC



# For Next Week

## Session Title

- 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*

## 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?

# Historical Context of Matthew

## Purpose

Matthew probably wrote his Gospel in order to preserve written eyewitness testimony about the ministry of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel emphasizes certain theological truths. First, Jesus is the Messiah, the long-awaited King of God's people. Second, Jesus is the new Abraham, the founder of a new spiritual Israel consisting of all people who choose to follow him. This new Israel will consist of both Jews and Gentiles. Third, Jesus is the new Moses, the deliverer and instructor of God's people. Fourth, Jesus is the Immanuel, the virgin-born Son of God who fulfills the promises of the OT.

## Author

The author did not identify himself in the text. However, the title that ascribes this Gospel to Matthew appears in the earliest manuscripts and is possibly original. Titles became necessary to distinguish one Gospel from another when the four Gospels began to circulate as a single collection. Many early church fathers (Papias, Irenaeus, Pantaenus, and Origen) acknowledged Matthew as the author. Papias also contended that Matthew first wrote in Hebrew, implying that this Gospel was later translated into Greek.

## Setting

Determining the date of composition of Matthew's Gospel depends largely on the relationship of the Gospels to one another. Most scholars believe that Matthew utilized Mark's Gospel in writing his own gospel. If this is correct, Matthew's Gospel must postdate Mark's. However, the date of Mark's Gospel is also shrouded in mystery. Irenaeus (ca AD 180) seems to claim that Mark wrote his Gospel after Peter's death in the mid-60s. However, Clement of Alexandria, who wrote only twenty years after Irenaeus, claimed that Mark wrote his Gospel while Peter was still alive. Given the ambiguity of the historical evidence, a decision must be based on other factors.

The date of composition for Mark is best inferred from the date of Luke and Acts. The abrupt ending of Acts which left Paul under house arrest in Rome implies that Acts was written before Paul's release. Since one of the major themes of Acts is the legality of Christianity in the Roman Empire, one would have expected Luke to mention Paul's release by the emperor if it had already occurred. This evidence dates Acts to the early 60s. Luke and Acts were two volumes of a single work, as the prologues to these books demonstrate. Luke was written before Acts. Given the amount of research that Luke invested in the book and the travel that eyewitness interviews probably required, a date in the late 50s is reasonable. If Luke used Mark in writing his own Gospel, as seems likely, by implication Mark was written some time before the late 50s, perhaps the early to mid-50s. Thus, despite Matthew's dependence on Mark, Matthew may have been written any time beginning in the mid-50s once Mark was completed. The earliest historical evidence is consistent with this opinion, since Irenaeus (ca AD 180) claimed that Matthew wrote his Gospel while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome (early AD 60s).

## Special Features

This Gospel was written from a strong Jewish perspective to show that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

## Extended Commentary

### Matthew 25:14-30

25:14–30 The man on the long journey symbolizes Jesus and the lengthy delay that will precede his second coming. The talents (whose value equaled six thousand days of wages) represent the financial resources, gifts, privileges, and opportunities that Jesus entrusts to his disciples. The faithful servants (true disciples) used their gifts and resources responsibly and were generously rewarded. The evil, lazy servant (a false disciple) failed to use the resources and was severely punished. He attempted to excuse his failure by assaulting the character of his master (v. 24). However, the master’s treatment of the other servants demonstrates that the wicked servant’s slander was unfair.<sup>3</sup>

## References

1. 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/>.
2. Charles L. Quarles, “Matthew,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1545.
3. Quarles, 1545.

## Author Bio

### Warren Wiersbe (Be Loyal)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of Back to the Bible, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

### David Platt (Exalting Jesus in Matthew)

David Platt is the author of three New York Times bestsellers, including *Radical*. He is lead pastor at McLean Bible Church in metro Washington, D.C., the former president of the IMB (International Mission Board), and founder of Radical Inc., a global center for the unreached that serves churches in accomplishing the mission of Christ. Platt received his master of divinity (MDiv), master of theology (ThM), and doctor of philosophy (PhD) from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He lives in Virginia with his wife and their children.

### R.C. Sproul (Matthew)

R.C. Sproul (1939–2017) was founder of Ligonier Ministries in Orlando, Fla. He was also copastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel, first president of Reformation Bible College, and executive editor of *Tabletalk* magazine. His radio program, *Renewing Your Mind*, is still broadcast daily on hundreds of radio stations around the world and can also be heard online.