

The Characteristics of a Good Steward

(Matthew 25:14-30)

An Expository Sermon

by Avon Malone

"For it is as when a man, going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability; and he went on his journey. Straightway he that received the five talents went and traded with them, and made other five talents. In like manner he also that received the two gained other two. But he that received the one went away and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them. And he that received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: lo, I have gained other five talents. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. And he also that received the two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: lo, I have gained other two talents. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou has been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. And he also that had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter; and I was afraid, and went away and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, thou hast thine own. But his lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter; thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest. Take ye away therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him that hath the ten talents. For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away. And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:14-30).

Matthew 25 begins with Jesus saying, "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto . . ." In verse 14 he discusses the principles of a very broad and all-encompassing stewardship of the kingdom. Paul said, "Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? *and ye are not your own*; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body and your spirit which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19; italics mine). Let these words be inscribed upon your heart. Let them be emblazoned upon a tender, sensitive conscience. Let them sink with indelible permanence into your very spirit and soul. "*Ye are not your own.*" When one comes forth from the liquid grave of baptism, he enters into a fellowship over the threshold of which is clearly inscribed, "*You are not your own. You have been bought with a price.*"

The idea of stewardship includes the totality of one's being. As T. B. Larimore, the great pioneer preacher, used to put it, "Mind, muscle, and money; time, tongue, and talent; head, hand, and heart; body, soul, and spirit." The entirety of man's being is Christ's because he has been redeemed "not with silver and gold, but with the blood of the Lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-20).

A steward by definition is one into whose care and custody has been entrusted that which belongs to another. It is his responsibility to take that which is another's and use it wisely and well. He must be courageous and wholesomely aggressive in the exercise of his stewardship.

Nathaniel Hawthorne kept a little notebook in which he jotted down verbal sketches or suggestions for stories, books, and novels he wanted to write. In one of those notebooks he had written: "The situation of a man in the midst of a crowd but so in the power of another life and all as if he were in complete solitude." That expression "in the power of another life and all" describes the Christian. The totality of a man's being is in the power of another so that the time

and talent he might have selfishly called "mine" is actually "His." You are a steward of it. You are a steward, not just of the money you place in the collection plate, but of all the rest as well. That is the broad, all-encompassing view of stewardship presented by Jesus in Matthew 25. What a difference it would make if we were made to understand that the entirety of our lives, every facet of our lives in every capacity, ability, and talent is His.

I. THE GOOD STEWARD IS FAITHFUL.

The steward is to be faithful. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:2, "Here, moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." Suppose you hire a man and entrust to his care certain machinery and funds. You place at his disposal everything necessary to do a particular job, but you soon find that he has embezzled the funds and has defrauded you of time. Obviously, this man is the opposite, the antithesis, of a good steward.

God places at our disposal life and time. Ben Franklin said, "If you value life, don't squander time because it is the stuff life is made of." We live as if life for us is going to be a five-act play and we are just in scene two of act one, but it may be a one-act play and the curtain may be about to fall. Our time, be it long or short, it is really His.

We are stewards of our bodies. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Even as a strength-sapping, influence-weakening, health-wrecking habit stands opposed to the principle of stewardship, so the driving of the body beyond its physical and emotional endurance is also poor stewardship.

The steward is faithful. He can be trusted. He is keenly and deeply conscious that he uses that which is not his own. My time, body, and my all belongs to Him, and it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.

When the master returns from the far country and receives an accounting of the five talent man who now has doubled that sum and has ten and of the two talent man who now has four, he commends them by saying, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21, 23).

As a part of a local congregation the good steward is faithful. It is my joy, for example, to spend a part of the summer in Colorado. I still have a teaching responsibility there. I make pro-

visions to fulfill that stewardship. The devoted Christian who is forced to be away from the local congregation of which he is a part must take care of his obligations at home. The New Testament teaches that every Christian is to be a part of a local congregation. The New Testament knows nothing of Christians at large. What would you think if you asked a soldier, "What unit are you in?" and he said, "None at all. I am a soldier at large and home is where my hat is in Uncle Sam's Army." We would all fear for our national security. We understand he has to be a part of a particular unit. Even so, Saul essayed to join himself to the disciples (Acts 9:26). He had been baptized in Damascus, but now he seeks to be a part of the fellowship of Christians in Jerusalem. When I am a part of a particular fellowship, I have a responsibility and a stewardship that relates to that particular relationship. If I am away, either before I go or after I return I must fulfill my commitments.

This stewardship concept certainly ought to find expression in the stewardship of the great material blessings that God has given us. If Jews under an inferior system and covenant gave the tithe, if pagans in worshipping dumb idols gave the tithe, it would seem that New Testament Christians ought to be able to do that much and more.

We are stewards of the gospel. It has been entrusted unto us and the awareness of this stewardship ought to move us to share it with others.

Congressman Tennyson Guyer said, "I know a man who speaks a dozen languages and he is a liar in all of them." Whether the good steward speaks one language or a dozen, he is altogether trustworthy in that language. Paul, when he wrote to Philemon about the runaway slave, said, "If he hath wronged thee at all, or oweth thee ought, put that to mine account; . . ."

II. THE GOOD STEWARD IS FRUITFUL.

The steward also is to be fruitful. Paul said, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

What kind of return is God getting for His investment in you? He has given you some wonderful capacities, some great faculties. Think about the faculty of speech. It can discourage

people tremendously or it can lift hearts. It can go into the sick room and brighten the whole day. It can catch a heart that is depressed and discouraged and lift it up to the heights. It can break a relationship. It can be that angry word thoughtlessly spoken that severs a relationship. What kind of return is God getting for His investment in you? Are you fruitful?

How about the use of your time? How about the use of your mind, that faculty that makes you so much like your Maker? Have you made a virtual cesspool out of it as you read that which is destructive or are you thinking on the things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and of good report? He has given you so much. You have been blessed materially beyond all the people of the earth.

Look again at verse 27. Jesus said, "Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers [to the usury], and at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest." I can't believe the Lord will be satisfied if we say on the last day, "Lord, you gave me a good mind and I am giving it back to you just like you gave it to me." I can't believe He will be pleased if we say, "Lord, you gave me a wonderful heart and spirit and here it is just like you gave it to me. I don't have any more capacity for love, or compassion, or any deeper sensitivity or sympathy for human suffering than when you gave it to me." That would not be good stewardship, would it? He wants that mind, heart, and spirit to grow, expand, and develop. He wants a return on His investment.

The Lord's discussion of the vine and branches in John 15 comes to a kind of a focal point in verse 8: "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; and so shall ye be my disciples." The steward is fruitful. He brings back a return on the investment to his master before whom he is responsible.

III. THE GOOD STEWARD IS FEARLESS.

Likewise, the steward is fearless. This word can be misunderstood. Certainly a good steward has a wholesome respect and fear, in the sense of regard and reverential respect, for his master. The Word says, "Let us . . . offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe" (Hebrews 12:28). He also recognizes the possibility of his own neglect. There is a certain element of

apprehension and fear in his heart. "Pass the time of your sojourning in fear," Peter wrote at 1 Peter 1:17. Paul wrote, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Vincent translates *fear* "conscientious caution and self-distrust." We have a reverence and regard for our Master and we recognize that our own neglect and apathy might cause us to be poor stewards.

But there is another sense in which *fearless* can be used. We need to be unafraid to take that mind, heart, and spirit, the time, tongue, and talent the Lord has given us and use them in a positive, outreaching, aggressive way. Sometimes individuals and whole congregations fall victim to the complex of the one talent man. "I was afraid," he said. What did the Lord say to him? He called him, "Wicked and slothful." He said, "Cast him out into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." You don't read about him committing adultery. You don't read about him perpetrating a great falsehood. He is called wicked because his fear causes him to shrink back from doing anything. Doing nothing is a grievous sin. "To him therefore that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin," James said (James 4:17). The good steward, while he has reverential regard for his Master, while he fears lest through his own neglect he should not serve as he ought, is fearless and unafraid to responsibly and prayerfully take that which has been given him and use it. With a wholesome kind of aggressiveness he seeks to use it.

Error and evil are very aggressive. Madalyn Murray O'Hair went before the Federal Communications Commission with a petition signed by 27,000 people in an effort to ban all religious broadcasts from TV and radio. Error and evil are very aggressive. It is about time that we repent of the attitude of the one talent man. He said, "I am afraid, and I will dig a little hole in the ground, and keep it."

Robert Ripley in his "Believe It or Not" column told about S. B. McCracken who was buried at Elkhart, Indiana. The epitaph on the marker read, "School is out. The teacher is gone home." I believe a steward, a real steward, is one who realizes that the time of his stewardship here is short. As Jesus put it in John 9:4: "We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the

night cometh, when no man can work." The time of preparation and probation on this earth will be soon gone.

And out of this life I am unable to take
things of gold and silver I make.
All that I cherish and hoard away
when I die on earth must stay.
All that I gather and all that I keep
I must leave behind when I fall asleep.
And I often wonder what I shall own
in that other world once I go alone.
What shall they hear and what shall they see
in the soul that answers the call for me?
Shall the great Judge commend when my task is
through my spirit for gaining some riches too?
Or at the last will it be mine to find
that all that I have worked for I have left behind?

The best kind of stewardship is the stewardship that takes into account the eternal dimension.

CONCLUSION

It is about time that we repent of being mesmerized by materialism, of bartering our birthright for a mess of pottage, of living just for the here and now. Let us summon up all of our capacities and let us commit them to his service and look forward one day to that sought-after benediction, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Now is the time to believe, repent of sins, and be baptized into His death (Romans 6:3). In this act of faith you come into the fellowship concerning which Paul said, "You are not your own." After your obedience you can live the rest of your life in the power of another, Jesus Christ.

Ten Commandments for Preaching Plus One

A personal list prepared by David Roper that he felt was needed in his own preaching. Adapt it to your own needs and post it above the place where you prepare your sermons.

- I. THOU SHALT START EARLY. A good sermon takes time to grow.
- II. THOU SHALT ALWAYS TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE NEEDS OF THY LISTENERS. It is not what sermon will "lather," but what sermon will be helpful.

III. THOU SHALT NOT SERVE WARMED-OVER SERMONS EXCEPT IN EMERGENCIES. Thoroughly rework "old" sermons, *adapting* them to the needs of *these* people. And as regards "emergencies": If the ox keeps getting in the ditch, sell the ox or fill up the ditch.

IV. THOU SHALT MAKE SURE THAT JESUS IS AT THE HEART OF THE SERMON. Otherwise it is not a *gospel* sermon.

V. THOU SHALT TRY TO MAKE THE SERMON INTERESTING, BUT NOT SO "CLEVER" THAT THE LISTENERS REMEMBER THEE (and/or the presentation) AND FORGET JESUS.

VI. THOU SHALT STRIVE TO PRESENT EVEN NEGATIVE SERMONS IN A POSITIVE WAY. Expect the *best* of people—and most will do their best. Also remember: Congregations, like children, should not be spanked when you are angry.

VII. THOU SHALT NOT DISGUISE PEP-TALKS, LECTURES, OR REPORTS AS "SERMONS." These have their place, but not at the worship hour. "Preach the word."

VIII. THOU SHALT MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO PREPARE TWENTY - MINUTE SERMONS. Then maybe you'll get through in *thirty*.

IX. THOU SHALT MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO MEMORIZE THE SCRIPTURES THOU PLAN TO USE. If you would like your listeners to remember them, why don't you get where you can remember them.

X. THOU SHALT PREPARE THYSELF PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND SPIRITUALLY TO PREACH. Preaching is such a sacred task that time spent in rest and review is not wasted time.

XI. THOU SHALT NOT ALLOW ANY-
THING TO DISTRACT THEE FROM
PREACHING WHEN THOU
STEPPEST INTO THE PULPIT. Be pre-

pared. Take the briefest of notes. Look
the people in the eye. Catch' em with
the first sentence. And *preach!*

©Copyright, 1983, 2004 by Truth for Today
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED