

After A Long Time
A Story About God Awareness
Matthew 25:14-30

- We are stewards or managers of all we are and have.
- Our stewardship is long-term and largely unsupervised.
- We are not responsible merely for what we have, but for what we do with what we have.
- There will be an accounting. Don't assume that lack of daily reminders means the accounting is cancelled.
- Good stewardship will be rewarded.

Introduction

Jesus was in Jerusalem. It was the last week before his crucifixion and it was his final opportunity to communicate truth to his followers. It would be safe to assume that every word he spoke was carefully chosen, perhaps more carefully than at any time in his ministry. He had just finished Matthew 24 about the signs of the end of the age and the time of his return. Now he continued with three stories in Matthew 25 about how it will be when he comes back.

First, Jesus told a story about ten young women who had been invited to a wedding celebration and called five of them wise and five foolish.

Last, he told a story about people who care about others and people who don't, calling them sheep and goats. **These stories are clearly about the end of the age – the time of his return.**

He told about the Kingdom of God in the Kingdom parables of Matthew 13. Now he says "At that time, the Kingdom of God will be like..." This is how it will be at the end of the age. When things are about to be wrapped up.

The end of the age comes for each of us. Do you know how many people die in the US every day? 6565 people per day. That's more than died in the attacks on September 11, 2001. Annually around 2.5 million people die in the US. Most of those don't attract my notice. My uncle, my Dad's brother, died yesterday. He was the last male in our family of his generation. Ten days ago he seemed fine, then a week in hospital, now he's gone.

Jesus says the end (or the beginning) will come without warning. When the end comes, it's too late to get ready. Jesus says, "Stay ready!"

Listen to this second of the three stories he told: **Matthew 25:14-30**

The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

14 "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a trip. He called together his servants and gave them money to invest for him while he was gone. 15 He gave five bags of gold to one, two bags of gold to another, and one bag of gold to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities—and then left on his trip. 16 The servant who received the five bags of gold began immediately to invest the money and soon doubled it. 17 The servant with two bags of gold also went right to work and doubled the money. 18 But the servant who received the one bag of gold dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money for safekeeping.

19 "After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. 20 The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of gold said, 'Sir, you gave me five bags of gold to invest, and I have doubled the amount.' 21 The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

22 "Next came the servant who had received the two bags of gold, with the report, 'Sir, you gave me two bags of gold to invest, and I have doubled the amount.' 23 The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

24 "Then the servant with the one bag of gold came and said, 'Sir, I know you are a hard man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. 25 I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth and here it is.'

26 "But the master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! You think I'm a hard man, do you, harvesting crops I didn't plant and gathering crops I didn't cultivate? 27 Well, you should at least have put my money into the bank so I could have some interest. 28 Take the money from this servant and give it to the one with the ten bags of gold. 29 To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who are unfaithful, even what little they have will be taken away. 30 Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (Matthew 25:14-30 NLT)

The Story

A powerful and prosperous businessman was going on a longish business trip to open a chain of businesses in another country. It would require him to be away for several months – he wasn't quite sure how long.

Before he left, he called in three of his key managers and gave them each a substantial sum of money to manage in his absence. He was aware of their abilities and so he entrusted them accordingly.

One man was given \$500,000. One man was given \$200,000. One manager was given \$100,000. Then the businessman boarded a ship and sailed away.

The businessman had something in mind. He was looking to the future and he thought, "If these guys do well, I'm going to put them in charge of three major areas of my business holdings." They didn't know that. They did know that he was a pretty tough boss.

The first manager went right away and bought land that looked good for development. Then he started developing and promoting and selling – some commercial and some residential.

The second manager went right away and bought construction equipment and hired workers and contracted to build houses and commercial buildings on the property the other man had begun developing.

The third manager said, "Too risky. Too much work. I'm fairly comfortable doing what I've been doing. I'll not even cash the check. If I put it in the office safe, nothing can happen to it. At least I won't lose it. These other guys could lose their shirts on this stuff they're doing!"

After a long time (Matthew 25:19)... the boss comes back. His first day in the office he calls them in for an accounting.

The \$500K guy comes in. A little bounce in his step. Pretty confident. "Boss, you trusted me with half a million and here's a million bucks. Not bad, huh?"

"Great job, million dollar guy! From today you are in charge of all my real estate holdings and your salary is doubled. I want to take you and your wife out to dinner tonight."

He goes out and says to the \$200K guy, "He's in a good mood. I got a promotion. My wife and I are going to dinner with him tonight!"

The \$200K guy comes in. Feeling good. But what would his \$200K merit in comparison to a cool million? Anyhow, "Boss, you trusted me with \$200 thousand and here's \$400 thousand."

"Great job \$400K guy! From today you are in charge of all my construction interests and your salary is doubled. I want to take you and your wife out to dinner tomorrow night."

He goes out and says to the \$100K guy, "He's really in a good mood. I got a promotion. My wife and I are going to dinner with him tomorrow night. Not bad, huh?"

The \$100K guy comes in. Maybe this will work out ok after all. "Boss you wrote me a check for \$100K and I realized how valuable it was and how easy it would be to lose it, and I was scared you'd be mad if anything went wrong so I didn't even cash it! Here it is, just what you gave me."

"You lazy, worthless bum! If I had wanted security, I would have put it in a safety deposit box. You're not only lazy, you're stupid! You could have at least put the money in the bank and I'd have some interest on it. You're fired! Clean out your desk and get out of here."

To his secretary, "Take the check and give it to the million dollar guy. I'm going to invest in people who do something with what I've given them."

What does this story mean? Does it have application to you and me?

- I believe there was an immediate application to the Jewish people, to the Jewish religious leaders.
- I believe there is an application to the church now and at Jesus' return.
- I believe there is an end-time application for all of us.
- **But I want to focus on an immediate application to our daily lives.**

1. Everyone has been entrusted with something of value.

We have different gifts according to the grace given to us. (Romans 12:6 NIV)

To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the good of all. (1 Corinthians 12:7 NIV)

Talents (Gifts – time – resources) represent God's investment in each of us. We are servants and we are stewards. A steward is one who is entrusted with the use or management of that which belongs to another.

Your stewardship trust may be a musical talent. It may be the opportunity to get an education. It may be the ability to see money as a tool so that you can use it to make more money. It may be a spiritual gift of mercy or hospitality. It may be an extroverted personality that opens doors for you. It may be a smile.

Not everyone gets the same opportunities or resources to work with.

- Some people are born “with a silver spoon in their mouth.” Born into a home with wealth, educational opportunities. Other people struggle for everything they ever get.
- Some are born with talents for music, talent for athletics, talent for business. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians, “Different gifts.”
- Talents are given on the basis of our capacity.
- We are given opportunity in accordance with our ability.

It’s all given and it’s all stewardship. It’s a trust from God.

Everyone does something with what he or she has. We are all exercising some kind of stewardship.

16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. 17 So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. 18 But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. (Matthew 25:16-18 NIV)

Two men, each with different levels of ability “went at once” and put their stewardship to work in a productive way.

One man took his talent and buried it. He was exercising stewardship in a most unproductive way.

We don’t choose whether to be stewards or not, we choose whether to be good stewards or bad stewards.

Good stewardship is doing the best you can with what you have been given.

- Faithful stewardship brings Approval, Increase, and Joy.
- Irresponsible stewardship brings Disapproval, Loss, and Sorrow.

We must never lose sight of the fact that there will be an accounting.

2. Our stewardship is long-term and largely unsupervised.

"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. (Matthew 25:19 NIV)

After a long time.

How easily we forget the things that once were so very clear. Think of Mary and Joseph when Jesus was twelve years old and they found him in the Temple after he had been missing three days. It had been so clear. "He will be the Son of the Most High. He will save his people from their sins." Angels, shepherds, wise men, fleeing to Egypt. Now it had degenerated to "What do you think you're doing? We've been worried sick!" It's so easy to lose the edge, to forget what it's all about.

Bo the wonder dog when we went away for too long. How long was too long? Very subjective in a dog's brain: Anything from 4 hours upward. Every garbage can and waste basket in the house tipped over and scattered. Then he'd rush to the window when he heard the car. Bouncing and wagging when we opened the door. Then one of us would look through into the kitchen and see the garbage all over the floor and we'd say, "Bo! What have you done?" Then he remembered!! "Oh no!!"

Short attention span: Like a goldfish.

Another story Jesus told. The master was away a long time and the manager began to mistreat the other servants. **Luke 12:45**

My two-year theory of Christianity. If this Christianity thing could just be a two-year plan we could ace it. You get saved. You commit your life to Christ. You give him your everything – your time, your talents, your resources – everything. Then you serve him with all your heart, mind, and strength for two years and he comes back and gets you. Two years. I can do two years standing on my head. It's this *"After a long time"* thing that's tough.

"God Awareness" – The greatest tool we have for maintaining good stewardship when our stewardship is long-term and largely unsupervised.

- My emphasis here is on *"A Long Time."* Our stewardship is long-term and largely unsupervised.
- God Awareness. How can we develop personal God-awareness? What is God-awareness?
- Accept the fact that you are responsible for developing and maintaining your God-Awareness level.

Yeah, well if he would do a miracle or something then I'd really be God-Aware! Yeah, for how long? How soon we drift back into the world of day-to-day!

What have you done for me lately?

Living in Jamaica in the 80's in a little village in the mountains. Life is pretty basic. Sometimes there's electricity, sometimes not. Sometimes the water is on, sometimes it's not. I can remember hearing water gurgling in the pipes and getting up at 3 AM and filling the bathtub and every available container in the house because we knew it wouldn't be on long.

Medical care was primitive and hospitals were where people went to die. Honestly, I developed a real distaste for hospitals that I still have to deal with today. Not many people who were admitted to Linstead Public Hospital came out alive. At least that's how it seemed to me.

When I got sick with hepatitis and the local doctor wanted to put me in the hospital, I just wouldn't go. Just the month before I had watched my friend, the principal of the local high school where I did devotions every week for the 2500 students, die in the hospital.

Life is a little more basic in the bush. Not easier, but simpler – less scientific maybe.

I remember so often hearing people stand up in church and testify – tell what God had done that they were thankful for.

So often the testimony would begin with something like, "He woke me up this morning!"

He kept me alive all through this past week.

He gives me the on-going ability to keep taking one breath after another.

When the life expectancy is 47 years like it is in Uganda, in a lot of ways it's easier to maintain God-Awareness.

Attitudes that help us maintain God Awareness:

- **The fear of the Lord.** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Tell about right and wrong approach to developing the Fear of the Lord. Proverbs 1:7; 9:10

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in understanding. (Proverbs 9:10 NLT)

What don't I mean by "Fear of the Lord?"

Wrong approach to the "Fear of the Lord." Kind of like, "Just wait till your father gets home! Boy are you going to get it!"

How my parents' generation kept their kids from going to the movies: "What if Jesus came back and you were in the movie theater? You think he'd come in there and get you? There's no way he would come and get you out of a nasty old movie theater. You'd be left behind for sure. Is that what you want?"

God is watching you. He sees everything you do!

Insert "God Can't See Me" Cartoon here.

Santa Claus is Coming to Town

You better watch out
You better not cry
You better not pout
I'm telling you why
Santa Claus is coming to town

He sees you when you're sleeping,
He knows when you're awake,
He knows when you've been bad or good,
So be good for goodness sake!

Here's God's real attitude about you and me:

The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him... (2 Chronicles 16:9 NLT)

Don't you realize how kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you..? (Romans 2:4 NLT)

- **A Thankful Heart.** An Attitude of Gratitude.

How sad to be an atheist. When something wonderful happens, there's no one to thank!

- **Commitment to God's purpose.**
 - The more you invest in God's kingdom, the more you maintain God-Awareness.
 - The more you get involved, the more you think God-Aware thoughts.

Practices that help us maintain God Awareness:

- **Prayer.** If you talk to him, you will stay in the awareness zone.
- **Praise.** Listening to and singing Praise and Worship music at home, in the car, on your iPod.
- **Daily Bible Reading** combined with thoughtful journaling. **Psalm 119:11, 15, 105**

I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. (Psalm 119:11 NLT)

I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways. (Psalm 119:15 NLT)

Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path. (Psalm 119:105 NLT)

- **Regularly meeting with other believers.** Develop some form of accountability with other believers. **Acts 2:44-47**

44 And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved. (Acts 2:44-47 NLT)

- **Mutual encouragement.** **Hebrews 10:24-25**

24 Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds. 25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25 NLT)

- **Telling your story.** Discussing what God is saying to us. Discussing what God is doing in our lives. **Malachi 3:16-17**

16 Then those who feared the Lord spoke with each other, and the Lord listened to what they said. In his presence, a scroll of remembrance was written to record the names of those who feared him and loved to think about him. 17 "They will be my people," says the Lord Almighty. "On the day when I act, they will be my own special treasure. I will spare them as a father spares an obedient and dutiful child. (Malachi 3:16-17 NLT)

Conclusion: **How You Doin'?**

- What have you got? What has God entrusted to you? What is your stewardship trust? What is your attitude toward your stewardship and your stuff?
- What are you afraid of? **What you're afraid might happen if you try will happen if you don't!**
- How's your God-Awareness? Growing or Decreasing?
- Opportunity to grow with your stewardship. Some people are like shrink-wrap Christians. When the heat is applied they just shrink their ministry opportunity to fit who and where they are at the time.
- Other people grow into the opportunity they are given. They grow and the scope of their service and effectiveness grows. Then they are given more. "Where did that come from?"
- Lord, I'm going to do the best I possibly can with what you've given me.
- I want to hear you say, "Great job! You've been faithful with a few things, now I'm going to give you something that really counts!"