

“Good Waiting”
Matthew 25:14-30/I John 4:7-12
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By Rev. Dr. Glenn Hink

I. Introduction

My grandfather was late. He was a rancher, and “up at the crack of dawn.” I was ready, and he was late. He was to pick me up at 8AM to ride in the wheat truck and combine, and he was late. I was 5 years old back then. I remember looking out the living room window waiting for the big wheat truck to pull up. My mom said something must have happened. Of course this was long before cell phones or texting. Life was slower then, and we did more waiting. My mom told me to go out and play, but don’t go too far. So I rode my bike, and played with the neighbor kids. But I “kept an eye” on the street in front of our house. I was busy, and waiting.

I heard the wheat truck before I saw it. It rumbled down the street and stopped in the front of our house. My grandfather got out. I ran over as my mom came out of the house. He said he’d gotten a flat tire.....an inside dual tire, which took longer to change. He looked at me said, “I’m glad you waited. And I’m glad you’re ready. Let’s go.” I hopped in the truck, rolled down the window, and waved to my friends as we lumbered off. My grandfather’s bib overalls, flannel shirt and cap smelled of oil, dust and wheat chaff. I was glad to be part of it. And I was glad I waited.

I’m not the best or worst at waiting. I try to use it as an exercise in patience. I took my wife’s car into the shop for some service work one morning this week. I was there as early as possible, and read while I waited. When the wait ran longer than expected I started watching my watch. Soon I was up walking around, not quite pacing, but almost. I was more than pleased when the car was ready to go. We had a church staff lunch out at a restaurant this week. There was only one server, so there were some periods of waiting. It was an hour and half long lunch....another exercise in patience. And I had to wait on a repair man this week. The office said he’d be there by 8:00AM. He got there at 8:30AM. Not a big deal.....but more waiting.

Waiting is part of life. Waiting is also part of the return of Jesus Christ.....the second coming.....the end of the age. Waiting for the return of Christ.....does it matter how we wait? In a parable Jesus answers that question.

II. Text: **Read Matthew 25:14-30.**

III. Exegesis

The first followers of Jesus expected him to return within their lifetimes. When it didn't happen they had to rethink their theology.....listen a little more carefully to what Jesus himself said. In Matthew 24 and 25 Jesus teaches that he will return, no one knows when it will happen, be ready, be patient.....and in this text he teaches that it matters how we wait. For 2000 years there have been times when Christians have forgotten, disregarded or misunderstood Jesus' own teaching about his second coming. We live in such a time today. What does this parable of the talents teach us about "good waiting?"

In the parable the master goes away to a distant land. That is Jesus and his ascension. But before he leaves he entrusts his servants with gifts from his estate. The gifts are enormous and gracious. He gives something called a talent, and a talent is equal to a life time of wages for a day laborer. The master trusts his servants with large gifts, and expects them to use them responsibly. Such is Jesus' trust and expectation of us. He gives us gracious gifts to share in his kingdom; abilities, opportunities, and power. We are to be about the purposes of the master while he is gone. Different gifts are given to all the servants, but all servants are given generous gifts, each according to his or her ability. Each is given a trust. Each has a responsibility. Each has a job to do.

When the master leaves, when Jesus ascends, a pattern of "good waiting" for his return is demonstrated. It's busy and active. The servant with 5 talents went off, went to work, and made 5 talents more. Likewise the servant with 2 talents went off, went to work, and made 2 talents more. Both are actively engaged in the world. Both actively share in the kingdom of the master. Both actively believe in the cause of the master in the world. The work of the master continues. They are trustworthy. They are responsible.

The surprise comes with the servant with 1 talent. We expect the same active pattern; went out, went to work, and made 1 talent more. But that's not what happens. Instead we see a very passive response; went off, dug a hole, hid the talent. This servant is not engaged in the world. He does not share in the kingdom or cause of his master. The master's gracious gift in his hands is buried. We wonder why? We wonder what will the master say? And we wonder if it makes any difference?

After a long time the master returns. This is the second coming, after a long wait. The servants are summoned to stand before the master and give an accounting of their service with the talents. This is each Christians giving an account of his or her life before Christ. Again we see a pattern:

The first servant says, "You gave me 5 talents, and I made 5 talents more." The Lord says, "Well done good and trustworthy servant. You have been trustworthy in a few things, you will be given much more; enter into the joy of your master."

The second servant says, "You gave me 2 talents, and I made 2 talents more." And again the Lord says, "Well done good and faithful servant. You have been trustworthy in a few things, you will be given much more; enter into the joy of your master."

The first two servants have practiced good waiting. They have been active. They have shared in the work, the kingdom, and the love of the master. They have been judged good and trustworthy. And busy servants are given more. There's no "sitting around and playing harps in heaven." There's more to do. They're welcomed into the kingdom of the Lord.

We know that the servant with 1 talent has already broken the pattern of active moving out, going to work and making more. And so we wonder will this pattern of judgment also be broken? The answer is "yes," the pattern will be broken, and this dialogue between the servant and the master is the most important part of the parable.

The servant with 1 talent makes his report to the master. He understands the master to be hard, harsh, grasping and taking. At the least he doesn't think the gift of one talent really makes any difference in the plans of the master. At worst, he resents the master, his kingdom and his cause. He blames the master for his lack of activity; "I did nothing because you are harsh and hard." As he took no responsibility for doing something with the talent, now he takes no responsibility for his lack of activity. "It's not my fault" he says. "I did nothing because of you." He doesn't want to serve the master.....he has no interest in the master's kingdom.....he believes the master can do it himself.

The judgment comes quickly, and it is severe. There is no "Well done good and faithful servant." Instead he hears, "You are wicked and lazy." There is no "You will receive more." Instead he hears, "Take away the talent that was given to him." There is no "Enter into the joy of your master." Instead he hears "Cast him out into the outer darkness." The servant has chosen to not use the 1 talent and share in the master's kingdom now. Why would he share in the master's kingdom to come? If someone chooses not to share in God's kingdom now, why would that person want to share in the kingdom of God to come? The consequences for his choices are allowed to reach their conclusions. He will live in the darkness.....outside the kingdom and joy of the master.

IV. Reflections

How we wait for the return of Jesus Christ matters. There is good waiting. And there is waiting that is a lot less.

Good waiting believes we are saved for service. God's salvation in Jesus Christ is not just saved **from** sin, but also saved **for** service. Like the parable it's going out, going to work, and making more talents. It's sharing in the love, cause and kingdom of the master. It's using 1, 2, 5, 10 or 100 talents to serve the Lord. The theme of "good waiting" has run through Matthew:

"You are the salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13);" "You are the light of the world (Mt. 5:14);" "Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven (Mt. 7:21);" and the final words of Jesus in Matthew, words that sound a lot like the words of the master, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, until the close of the age (Mt. 28:18-20)." "Here's some talents" the risen Jesus Christ says. "Now go to work until I return." That's good waiting.....using talents...sharing in the kingdom of the master. It's saved for service.

I have a friend who sends out cards.....birthday and anniversary cards. He sends out 2 or 3 a day. He doesn't get out much anymore.....but he sends cards. He told me he and his wife started it years ago. She had a big family, and together they sent the family cards. When she died, he kept it up, and decided to include a lot of people in his church family. Some folks get cards and don't know him.....but they like it. I don't know if that's 5 talents, or 2 talents or 1 talent.....and it really doesn't matter. But I do know it's about the kingdom of the master. And I do believe at the end of the day my friend will hear "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master." Good waiting is about saved for service.

Good waiting is also about joy and gratitude that just comes from the heart. It's the grace of God that transforms our hearts, so that, as was read in I John 4, we love God and love each other. I believe beneath the good waiting of the two faithful servants of the master is a love of the master. They go out, go to work, and make more talents for the master because they love the master, love the people the master loves, and love the master's kingdom. They don't serve to get back anything. They don't serve to serve themselves. Rather they serve because they are thankful for the master's grace....they serve because they love. It's what motivates parents to give so much to a child, and what motivates adult children to give so much in caring for aging parents;

love. It's not about getting. It's all about gratitude and love. Good waiting is motivated by gratitude and love for the master, Jesus Christ.

One day the Lord called two brothers to special service. The oldest brother followed the call. He left his home, a promising career, and the girl that he loved. He served the Lord in a distant land with the poorest people there. In time a persecution arose, and the young man was unjustly arrested, convicted and put to death. When the young man stood before the Lord, the Lord said, "Well done good and faithful servant. You have given 10 talents of service. Receive 1000's of talents of reward. Enter into the joy of your master."

The younger brother tried to ignore the call of the Lord. He stayed in his home town, and married the girl that he loved. He had a large family, a successful career, and a long life. Occasionally he would go to church and give alms to the poor. When he died he stood before the Lord. And the Lord said, "Well done good and faithful servant. You have given 1 talent of service. Receive 1000's of talents of reward. Enter into the joy of your master."

Now when the older brother had heard that his younger brother had gotten the same reward as he, he was surprised, and he was pleased. And he went to the Lord and said, "Lord, knowing everything I know now, if I were to live my life over again, I would live it the same way, loving and serving you." And the Lord was surprised. And the Lord was very pleased."

That's the best story I know, because it shares the greatest truth I know. It's about grace and surprise, talents, good waiting, a heart of love, and the joy of the master. Good waiting is motivated by gratitude and love. So may we wait.