

Work While You Wait

Matthew 25:14-30

Introduction

Wait or Work?: William Miller (1782-1849) was a Baptist lay preacher, farmer, and Bible student) from northeastern New York state. Obsessed with Biblical prophecies in Daniel and armed with lots of historical speculation and some impressive interpretive gymnastics he eventually prophesied the Second Coming of the Lord would occur between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844. The group that followed him gained national attention and traction (known as Millerites). Once his initial calculation proved false (a *miscalculation*), his followers (like many cults and conspiracy theorists) used “fuzzy math” and creative interpretations to calculate a new date of Jesus’ return (exactly 7 months later), **October 22, 1844**. There’s lots to be said about their misreading of Scripture (e.g., “no one knows the day or the hour”), and lots of historical interest (this “Adventist” sect spawned various theological innovations and groups, including the Seventh Day Adventist movement). As October 22, 1844 came and went, the great anticipation became the **Great Disappointment**.

- One thing of interest was how people behaved believing that Jesus was returning. Reports indicate that many Millerites quit their jobs and sold their belongings. Some got dressed up and went to various hilltops to wait for Jesus to return.
 - Even if we knew the day (which we don’t), we’re all supposed to *live as if he could return at any moment*. Should we quit our jobs and go wait on a hill?

End Times Discipleship: Thankfully, Jesus answers this question directly. We’ve explained in detail how we’re living in the last days (and have been since the death of Jesus) and that Jesus could return at any moment (to judge the living and the dead). So what do we do in light of this? **We get to work**. Jesus has left us with a job to do.

- God has not called us to a holy huddle, waiting for him to come back and fix everything, he has commissioned us to live as his representatives, fulfilling what he has called us to do.
- This is the third in a set of escalating parables. (1) The first described a wicked servant who didn’t know when his master would come back, so he behaved wickedly (as wicked servants do). He was **apathetic** to the return of the master. (2) The second was about 10 young women who anticipated the coming of the groom and the ensuing wedding feast. But only half the women were prepared to make the journey. The other half wanted the **excitement of the party without the preparation** to attend. (3) This week’s parable is about a master and three servants and what it looks like to **work hard** in the master’s absence.

¹⁴ “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ ²¹ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ ²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ ²³ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴ He also who had received the

one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' ²⁶ But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed?' ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

1. Entrusted with a Responsibility (vv. 14-15)

¹⁴ "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

It: What is "it"? KoG(h). This parable continues to describe the nature of the coming KoG.

Representatives: Who are the characters in this story? There is a man (master) and three servants.¹ The master is going on a journey (later described as a long journey).

- He will be gone a long time and he has chosen these three servants to be his ambassadors, his representatives. They will manage his money and direct his affairs in his absence. In a very real sense, they are the visible representation of the master in his physical absence.
 - Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20).
 - The church is God's plan A, the means by which he is pursuing the reconciliation of the lost.
 - Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church (Co. 1:24).
 - "This does **not** imply that there is a deficiency in Christ's atoning death and suffering on the cross, which would contradict the central message of this letter and all the rest of Scripture as well (cf. Heb. 9:12, 24–26; 10:14). Christ's sufferings are in fact sufficient, and nothing of one's own can be added to secure salvation. What was "lacking" in Christ's afflictions was the future suffering of all who (like Paul) will experience great affliction for the sake of the gospel" (ESV Study Bible).
 - "Christ has prepared a love offering for the world by suffering and dying for sinners. It is full and lacking in nothing—except one thing, a personal presentation by Christ himself to the nations of the world and the people of your workplace. God's answer to this lack is to call the people of Christ to present the afflictions of Christ to the world" (Piper) We see this in missionaries and evangelists and (hopefully) in our own lives, a visible, bodily, sacrificial demonstration of the suffering of Christ to take the gospel to all people.

¹ This type of "slavery" is common in the Ancient Near East and not like modern chattel slavery. These slaves/servants have the freedom to live, work, and have families. In fact, the ancient slave could earn wealth and sometimes purchase his freedom.

Entrusted: “Entrusted” (παραδίδωμι) involves the idea not only of giving or handing something over to someone but, particularly, giving a right or an authority to someone that you possess (e.g., Power of Attorney).

- Everything we have is a gift from God:
 - “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor 4:7).
 - “John answered, ‘A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven’” (Jn 3:27).
- **Unearned:** None of these men “earned” their investments (*per se*). Each was entrusted with a varying amount of money. **This is at the heart of the gospel.** We are not loved because we are lovely; we are lovely because we are loved. We are not chosen because we are useful; we are useful because we are chosen. Our security, identity, and belonging are not wrapped up in our performance or behavior, but in the perfect and immovable choice of God.

The master gives each servant a sum of property (lit. his “stuff”). The “property” (τὰ ὑπάρχοντα) refers to the master’s belongings (e.g., stuff, wealth, money). In this context, the “stuff” is described in amount as “talents” (a unit of weight that often was measured by the weight of silver; cf. British lbs).

- A talent (τάλαντον) is approximately 20 years’ wages. One talent equals approximately 6,000 denarii. One denarius equals approximately one day’s wages. It would take 20-25 years to earn one talent if you worked 250-300 days a year.
 - Compare how much a modern laborer would earn in 20 years if they worked 200 days a year.
 - One talent is *a lot* less than 5 talents (but is still a lot!). We all have more from God than we need or deserve. Rather than being frustrated at his blessings, we should be thankful.

Varying Amounts: The decision to give one servant five talents and another two and still another only one is based on the discretion of the master (remember, it’s still “plenty”). The master knows the giftedness, aptitude, attitude, and opportunity of each servant and gives accordingly. **The servants do not balk at his choice.** In fact, the failure of the third servant later in the story seems to prove that the master chose correctly!

- It is not up to the servant to worry how much the master chose to give him but, rather, **to be faithful with whatever amount was entrusted.** He is responsible to work hard with whatever investment (great or small) is in his possession.
- “It is ingrained in us that we have to do exceptional things for God— but we do not. We have to be exceptional in the ordinary things of life, and holy on the ordinary streets, among ordinary people— and this is not learned in five minutes” (Oswald Chambers).
 - How often do we wish God had entrusted us with more or different gifts and responsibilities? Maybe he knows you couldn’t handle it (i.e., why I think most of us shouldn’t be rich, with the love of money and all). Maybe he knows you’re the right person for where you are.
 - Don’t despise the gifts God has given you.

Responsibility: All of us have a great responsibility to invest whatever gifts God has given us for the advancement of his kingdom. It’s not just a duty, it’s an opportunity.

- Make the most of it (the expectation was not the safekeeping of the master’s but its wise investment).
- Here’s the truth: God has called us to be ambassadors of his kingdom, proclaiming and demonstrating the good news of Jesus. The responsibility is too great, the task is too urgent, and

the stakes are too high for us to bury our gifts, avoid our calling, or get distracted in our obedience.

2. Expected to Invest (vv. 16-23)

¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' ²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' ²³ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

Eager Effort: The first two servants have great success with the master's money. They both double their investment! What is clear is their **eagerness** (they joyfully and wholeheartedly obey the master). They immediately ("at once"; εὐθέως; cf. disciples leaving their boats) went and began to invest the money given them. The sense of immediacy is important in discipleship. These first servants are a picture of enthusiastic discipleship. They are eager to get to work for their master.

- There is something pure about discipleship that involves simple and immediate obedience. *There is surely a time for waiting but, when God commands, the surest path is of immediate obedience.* Very often, delayed obedience is disobedience (e.g., I'll get around to it; you might not and probably won't).

Immanence: The master returns "after a long time" and goes to settle with his three servants. As this is a "kingdom" parable, the eschatological force can't be ignored. The return of the master can happen at any moment (e.g., imminent). How do you view the return of Christ? As a distant, fanciful myth or a quick-approaching reality? Is it something that makes you think, I have infinite time? Or the time is short? Does it create apathy or action?

- The *immanence* of Jesus should encourage us to persevere to the end (e.g., "you're almost there" at the end of a race; countdown at the end of a workout).

What is Success?: The **rate** of return was the same for both of these servants, though the **quantity** was different. But, when the master returned, their reward was the same. Why? They were being rewarded for their **effort** and **obedience** (the third servant buried his portion in the ground). The two good servants worked hard while they waited. The master simply wants his gifts to be put to good use while he's gone.

- The metric of success is **faithfulness**. Their reward is a function of their faithfulness, not their apparent success.

Reward: What was the reward? 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' The reward for success is **increased opportunity** and **shared joy**.

- True freedom is not freedom "from" but freedom "for," to do what one is created to do! True joy is found in participating in the task for which God created us. We were created to work for God, to worship and serve him (cf. Gen. 2:15).

- It is counterintuitive that the appropriate reward for faithful work is *more* work. Every step of faithfulness opens more opportunities to serve the master! The role of the disciple never ends. The opportunity to work on behalf of the master is not a task to be completed but a chance to worship. *Contra* the idea of retirement may have so infiltrated every aspect of our modern lives. One commentator asks the piercing question: “Is it reading too much into the parable to [envision] heaven as a state not of lazy pleasure but of active cooperation with the purpose of God as well as enjoyment of his favor?” (R. T. France). The opportunity to do more work on behalf of the master is a path to true and lasting joy. Faithful service leads to more joy. The reward for success is greater than economic prosperity, it is the incalculable joy of the master!
- **Are you fulfilling your calling to work for the master? What joy are you missing?**

3. A Warning Against Neglect (vv. 24-30)

²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed,’ ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.’ ²⁶ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed?’ ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Misunderstand the Master: The third servant’s failures come into clear view when he stands before his master (as we all will). He has faulty logic (bad excuse). He claims that the master is unfair and difficult and, therefore, he was **afraid to take a risk**.

- Is this true that the master is harsh? Doesn’t seem harsh to the other guys. The master is reasonable and knows their different abilities. He is harsh to sin, not to his servants.

The accusations of the servant are from a fearful worker trying to justify his inaction. The master is not unfair. He is not an unreasonable taskmaster but **he does have a task** for his people.

Faulty Logic: The servant’s excuse doesn’t even make sense. He claims that the master’s severity causes him to bury the money, but one would think that would cause him to work even harder. Truth? **He feels that burying the money in the ground is the safest proposition.** There is no chance for failure. However, there is no chance for success either. The servant was afraid to lose. The master doesn’t care about his loss, he cares about his apathy (he also might have gained money).

Fear: He says he was afraid. The Bible teaches that fear is really an act of worship. We give authority to what we fear. That is why we are to “fear God” but not man. When we fear God, we submit to Him—we worship Him. When we fear other things we actually submit to them (e.g., fear of flying, won’t get on the plane). Rather than fearing God, he fears failure.

- What if he failed? What if he lost the money? He was afraid to risk. **But the master would rather him risk and fail than not risk at all.** His fear paralyzed him. Fear created inaction and inaction was disobedience (how often do we sin simply by our inaction?).
- The safest and easiest path was to bury the money in the ground. But following Christ is not safe, nor can it be. **Safety-guaranteed Christianity is a false and faithless route.** The path of Christ involves great cost. That is why the disciple is told to count the cost. **Safety is not guaranteed**

but joy is. Not only does he miss out on the joy of his master, he is cast... into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Application

1. Invest the gifts God has given you.

- Whatever God has given you (e.g., wealth, gifts, time, stage of life, relationships, etc.) should be invested in his kingdom. You should **not envy** the gifts of others or the things you don't have. God's people are different. Every believer is equally valuable but is not the same. It does no good to "look with envy at the different hand which has been dealt" to others "but to make the most of what you do have" (R. T. France). **You are only responsible for the calling and gifts God has given you.** Rest in the fact that he has given you everything you need to accomplish the task to which he has called you. We have what we need from God (cf. 2 Peter 1:3). Each one of you, is to steward and invest your gifts, abilities, and calling in God's kingdom.
- And God has given all of us so much: "Much will be expected of those to whom much has been given" (Luke 12:48).
- Invest in the church, in the community, in spreading the good news of the kingdom.

2. Pursue joy by serving Jesus.

- Find your joy in the heart of your master (e.g., where your heart is, your treasure will be also). While the master is away, we work with all of our might. We work hard while we wait. We expend the maximum effort we have for our master. **We work hard, not to earn the love of our Savior, but because we get to join the Savior in his work.** Sharing in the "joy of the master" is the ultimate reward. The reward of obedience is not a completed task, it is the joy of participating in the work of Jesus. The path of Jesus leads to unquenchable joy.

3. Risk is right.

- "The Christian life is a call to risk" (Piper). Risk is the method God uses to display our faith. What we are doing is a risk. It is not foolish or without the promise and blessing of God, but it is a risk. There is no guarantee (from our perspective), but from God's perspective the battle is won. We cannot live with a posture of scarcity. This is no less true of churches. Churches that are worried about what could go wrong quickly hoard resources, become inward focused. We can't hoard the message of the gospel, which means we can't hoard any aspect of our lives (i.e., "generosity fuels the mission"). Our goal is not merely not to do anything wrong but to risk for what is right.
- God is great, so we don't have to be in control. God is glorious, so we don't have to fear others. God is good, so we don't have to look elsewhere. God is gracious, so we don't have to prove ourselves.
- We follow Christ from a posture of faith and not fear. We walk in faith, knowing that God has promised to build his church and the gates of hell cannot prevail against her. We are not proving ourselves to God, worried that if we mess up this whole venture will fall apart. We can trust the goodness of God and serve with freedom and confidence.

4. Prioritize faithfulness.

- The path to approval, success, and abundance is faithfulness. God does not reward based on quantity but quality. We do not rely on cleverness, talents, gifts, intelligence, money, pedigree, or other human abilities. At the end of the day, **God ordains faithfulness as the vehicle for fruitfulness.** Discipleship is not a stage of life. We don't evangelize, disciple, and plant a church,

and then head out to pasture. You don't do your job then retire. We want to "do it right" and "do it well" but it's more important that we "do something."

Are you a hard-working, joyful, obedient, and faithful disciple?

- This was part of the vision for ministry at RH. Re-envision and recommit!