

DPC's got Talent

Matthew 25:14:30

¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents,¹⁴ to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ ²¹His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ ²³His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ ²⁶But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will

be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

This Parable of Jesus always makes me a little uncomfortable. I remember hearing this story as a child in church and Sunday school and it felt like some sort cosmic test God was putting on. That somehow if you didn't perform the judgment of God suddenly falls upon you and you are that third slave. This felt like that classic nightmare where you walk into class only to discover that you have a test you didn't study for but the other two people in class knew about it. But is that really what this parable is all about?

I think it is far less about this cosmic judgment and more about the nature of God. Yes, you can read it as a cosmic exam but much of the parable points us in another direction.

The first striking thing you notice about this parable is that the master does not give instructions. He simply hands these slaves money. He does not tell them a time frame or even if he will return. He simply entrusts them with his money. The sum is huge, equivalent to more than 15 years of wages per talent. In the Luke version the sum is smaller but I think Matthew is trying to make a slightly different point. Time passes, the master returns he shows back up wanting a full accounting of his money. The first two slaves have doubled his money he pours high praise onto them, calling them good and trustworthy. Inviting them into his joy this word for joy can also be understood as a banquet feast or a wedding feast. The invitation is to enter into the banquet with the master. The attention shifts to this third slave. The third slave's immediate response is a harsh characterization of the master. This slave goes on the attack, basically calling him a thief, reaping where he did not sow and gathering where he did not plant. As the audience we are supposed to be genuinely surprised by this plot twist. There is no indication the master is cruel, in fact every indication is the direct opposite, this parable that points to a generous master and a good master. He entrusted two slaves with more than a lifetime of wealth, he entrusts all three of them to do their own accounting he does not check up on them ask for quarterly reports, or monthly updates. The only audit is the master showing up years later.

Think about how ridiculous this sounds, how overly generous it is, how overly trusting it is. This story echoes many other parables that Jesus told. The parable of the unforgiving debtor where a man is forgiven millions of dollars of debt only to put in his fellow servant in prison for owing him a small sum or the parable of the unfaithful slave, where a slave is put in charge of a household while the master is away and he begins to beat the other slaves the master returns and the slave is also given over to the darkness.

All three slaves handled this opportunity differently. The first two slaves clearly believe in the goodness of the master, you see this in their actions because

they risked a lifetime of wages and their risk pays off they are able to double their sums. We don't hear fear in these slaves but gratitude; gratitude for the opportunity they were given, gratitude to show their loyalty, ingenuity, and trust. But the third slave sees this differently. His view of the master is unlike the others he doesn't see how he was given an opportunity and entrusted with responsibility. Instead he sees a harsh cruel master. The master responds to the slave's criticism by fulfilling his view of him. The master takes the talent and expels him to the outer darkness. We are left wondering who is this master really, is the master kind and generous or cruel and exacting. I think this is a question we all struggle with especially if you open a newspaper or a web browser. This question is being echoed loudly and clearly around our world it is asked when we as a nation experience our 307th mass shooting of the year¹, it is asked in the voice of multiple hurricanes, earthquakes, and it is asked in the midst of a humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. The question that is being asked. Who is this master?

We have to hear this question in the context of Matthew, because one parable cannot give a complete picture of God, indeed nothing can give us a complete picture of God. In Matthew we hear an ongoing argument between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day, they were given wonderful promises and told to bless the world. Instead it was like they buried the promises in the ground. We see in Matthew descriptions of God's extravagant grace but we also experience images of others being cast into the outer darkness. These descriptions of God frustrate our very efforts to neatly summarize God. One scholar said it this way, "These images of God resist systematization, while still speaking to reality of judgment and necessity for decision and responsible action."² We would like to neatly wrap up God but we can't.

It is important to remember where this parable is placed in Matthew, this is near the climax of Matthew. In just two chapters Jesus will experience his own abandonment, he will be cast into the outer darkness, in a few pages, Christ is on the Cross and cries out "MY God, My God, why have you forsaken me." The light of the world is in the darkness. This reminds me of a song Johnny Cash covered called "I see a darkness". In the song the narrator describes times between friends of sharing thoughts, and experiences. The friend repeatedly goes back to a simple and haunting chorus "And then I see a darkness, and then I see a darkness, and then I see a darkness, he sings that line on last time, and then I see a darkness, then you finally hear a response "Did you know how much I love you".

That is the answer to the question. Who is the master? The master is love, the love of God, the love of Jesus, the love present with us through the Spirit, the love that is experienced through the faithfulness of God's people engaging others and the world. Yes, at times the darkness rises but there is always hope, judgment is God's and God's alone but extravagant ridiculous grace is God's and God's alone as well. We see in these parables it is not our job to worry, it is not our job to judge others, our job is to simply respond to the master and to be faithful in what God has called us to

¹ <http://www.businessinsider.com/how-many-mass-shootings-in-america-las-vegas-shooting-2017-10>

² Commentary on Matthew, 453.

do. I am so excited about the many ways I see our church doing this, our church living out our investment and being entrusted with more. I see this in our children's ministry working hard to connect to young families and young children in an increasing complex world. Just the other night I took two of my boys to see the fall musical at CB East. When they got home the first thing they told their mom was not about the musical but that they saw their Sunday School teachers at the musical and that was cool. I see this in a tweens ministry raising money for Americans for Native Americans, providing meals, backpacks, and hope. I see this as a 150 people from DPC volunteered at Feed My Starving children to pack meals to save the life of Children. I see this in our recent flourish initiative and how it challenged me and helped to grow in my faith and hear that call echoed in our community. I see it in a retreat I led a few weeks ago, as 14 churches gathered to experience worship fellowship DPC sent 15 volunteers to staff the kitchen, the nurses station, and the adventure course. I see this as a church as we prepare to welcome the community for advent, Lessons and Carols, and Christmas Eve. The question is being asked Who is the master, how will you answer that question? How will your life be an example of faithfulness? In what new ways is God calling you to a deeper more abiding relationship?

