



Week 3

Day 15

Matthew 25:14-30 “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,^[a] each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²² “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

²³ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²⁴ “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸ ““So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an

abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

This parable is connected to the Parable of the Virgins that we read on Day 13. Remember, Jesus had been answering the disciple's questions about the end of the age. Then He tells these parables. In this one, Jesus is the man going on a journey. As we saw on Day 13, He went to prepare a place for us. He will not be physically present with us for a time. He sent His Spirit to dwell within us. He will be returning. This parable, like the Parable of the Virgins, gives us insight into what Jesus is expecting from His servants while He is away.

At first read, it seems pretty obvious that Jesus expects us to make use of the resources He has given us to increase His Kingdom. A "talent" (translated here to be a bag of gold) was 20 years' wages. Even the one who only received 1 bag of gold, received a huge sum. All 3 servants were given a great number of resources. The master was generous to all.

We definitely want to ponder how we are using what we've been given, as we study this parable. To make it easy to remember, we often say we have been given time, talents and treasure. Those are our resources, our bags of gold. We freely offer our time in the service of the gospel. We look at areas where we have skills and seek ways to put those skills to use for the Kingdom of God. And we give of our money to help those in need and further advance the mission of the Christ's Church.

However, if that is all we get from this parable, we are missing the main point. We must look closer at why the servant with one bag of gold didn't act in the same way as the other servants. In looking at his words, we find that the lazy servant believed things about the master that were not true. He believed the master was hard. The lazy servant believed the master was unfair, taking what he did not work for. He related to the master out of fear. It is important to God what we think and say about Him. In the book of Malachi, God rebukes the Israelites for this same attitude.

Malachi 2:17 You have wearied the Lord with your words.

“How have we wearied him?” you ask.

By saying, “All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and he is pleased with them” or “Where is the God of justice?”

This attitude toward God is not new. It is ancient. Eve, in the garden of Eden, was convinced by the serpent that God was withholding good from her and treating her unfairly. When the reality all around her was that God had generously lavished her and Adam with every good thing.

When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, He declared who He is and what His character is like.

Exodus 34:5-7 Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished...”

Going back to our parable, the biggest problem with the wicked, lazy servant was not that he didn't do a lot of work to gain more. His lack of deeds flowed from seeing his master in an unfavorable light. He didn't love the master. He didn't know the master's character. He didn't have a desire to see the master's kingdom prosper.

When we view God as the lazy servant did, we see him through a lens of lack and develop a victim mentality towards Him. We see what He has given us as too small to make a difference. We hyper focus on what we don't have instead of seeing the large number of gifts we've been given. We may be bothered that others seem to get more. It not fair. We begin to worry that if we give, we may not have enough. If we take a risk and something doesn't pan out, not only will we have lost, but God will punish us. He's hard and mean. So, we don't make use of what He has given us. We bury it.

This attitude can develop in any of us. It's subtle and extremely dangerous. There are warning signs in your own heart that you can look out for. Jealousy is one. Identify it quickly and take it to God. When you find yourself not wanting to pray about something because you feel like God is indifferent to you or it won't make a

difference, that's a red flag. Take a close look at your thoughts and what comes out of your mouth. Are you dwelling on and speaking about God's goodness to you or is your heart full of discontent and grumbling?

Notice that it was in the risk taking, giving away and putting to use of what they had been given, that the other 2 servants gained more. When we view God correctly, we know what our Master is compassionate, generous, slow to anger and abounding in love. That makes us able to take risks, give lavishly and employ our gifts. We know that our God is gracious if we mess up. We know He is just and fair. When you operate in this way, you're guaranteed more.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you recognize any of the warning signs in your own heart, that you are not viewing God correctly?
2. Do you give generously of your time? Are you employing your talents and abilities in the service of God? Do you regularly give of your money? If you answered no to any of these, that is another warning sign. Ask the Holy Spirit to identify where you have a skewed view of God that makes you hesitant to give in these areas.
3. Did you answer "yes" to all three questions in #2? If so, you should expect more. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to where He is pouring out more gifts and blessings upon you and how He would have you use those.

Now Let's SOAP

What SCRIPTURE stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you OBSERVE about that scripture?

How can you practically APPLY this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a PRAYER asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

Day 16

Matthew 25:31-46 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

We see in this parable, two very distinct groups of people: the sheep and the goats. They are separated by their deeds. The sheep did good to others, were commended and went on to eternal life. The goats ignored the needs of others, were condemned and went on to eternal punishment.

It's really important to remember that the parable of the virgins, bags of gold and sheep & goats were told together. The Parable of the Virgins establishes that our relationship with Jesus is like that of a bride and groom. We are to love Him and long for His return. The Parable of the Bags of Gold reinforces that our deeds need to flow from that relationship. We love God and employ what we have been given because we know His goodness. Those are foundational because, if we read this parable without those, we can think that we are saved by our good deeds. We know that we are saved only by the grace of God.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Once we are saved, it is our love for God and His Holy Spirit living in us that prompt us to do good works.

James 2:14-19 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

James says that if we don't have good deeds that accompany our faith, it is not a faith that saves. He reminds us that the demons have belief. They believe in God. But the demons, like the lazy servant, have an incorrect view of God that causes their deeds to be wicked instead of righteous. Our righteous deeds must flow from our love for God.

Interestingly, right before Jesus told these parables, He was asked what the greatest commandment is. He replied:

Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’^[a] ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[b] ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Just like it's important to remember the order of these parables, it is vital that we do not mix up the order in what Jesus says here. We must love the Lord with EVERYTHING first. All good deeds done to others must flow from that. We have a serious problem in our society right now because many are wanting to reverse the order when it comes to love.

If I love God first, with every part of me, His laws, His word, the leading of His Spirit and exalting Him are the most important things to me. I can only love my neighbor well from this perspective. That's because sometimes I may see my neighbor disobey God. If love for God is first, I will bring correction. I may see my neighbor needing food. If love for God is first, I will know that I can give and be provided for. I may be hurt by my neighbor. If love for God is first, I can forgive freely.

However, many people want to put love for neighbor first. If love for neighbor is first, then our neighbor gets to make their own rules and we must agree. It's horrific to know that there are entire “churches” and denominations that have put loving people above loving God, which is not love at all. They allow and even applaud as people disobey the laws of God and they call it love. These “churches” might even look like sheep. They might feed the poor and help the needy. But unless those deeds flow from putting love for God and who He says He is first, they are worthless. Giving someone a cup of water on their way to hell is not love.

These three parables all have eternity in view. Jesus was directing them to an end times church, which is us. He expects us to be watchful, alert, and busy about His business out of our great love for Him.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you find yourself focusing more on doing deeds or loving God? If so, spend some time simply praising God and thanking Him for the blessings He has given you.
2. The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats gives us very practical ways to love others. Pick one of the actions of the sheep and ask the Holy Spirit to give you opportunity to love someone in that way this week.
3. The world is loud about what they believe love looks like. Jesus was very clear that all love must come from loving God with every part of us first. Have you found yourself reversing the order? Ask the Lord to give you the boldness and courage to love Him first, even when that looks like confronting someone you love about sin.

Now Let's SOAP

What SCRIPTURE stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you OBSERVE about that scripture?

How can you practically APPLY this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a PRAYER asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

Day 17

Luke 10:25-37 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

27 He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’^[a]; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[b]”

28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

30 In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. **31** A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. **32** So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33** But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. **34** He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35** The next day he took out two denarii^[c] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

37 The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

This parable takes us right back where we left off, loving God first, then loving our neighbor. This expert in the law knew what was most important. However, he was interested in finding out how he could live according to this law, without being too uncomfortable. We are people who love loopholes. How much can we get away with and still be in good standing with God. As long as loving my neighbor means loving the people who look like me, talk like me, think like me and treat me well, I'm good. But that isn't the way Jesus loves, so that can't be the way we love.

Luke 6:32-36 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

The hatred between Jews and Samaritans went back centuries and is too much to cover here. They had fought against each other, sabotaged each other, and each group looked down on the other. Though both groups would have claimed to serve the God of Abraham, the rift between them was religious, political and racial. Hmmm, does that sound familiar?

This expert in the law got the shock of his life when Jesus equated his neighbor, someone he should show love to and be loved by, to be a Samaritan. A modern telling of this story might have a Ukrainian giving aid to a Russian. Or how about a MAGA supporter helping someone who had gotten beat up at a pride parade. It might look like a Palestinian rescuing a Jew or a Jew rescuing a Palestinian. Unfortunately, we could go on with scenario after scenario because there are a lot of groups that hate a lot of other groups in our world. How, as Christians, do we deal with all this hate and division. Jesus not only told this parable to instruct us, but He interacted with a Samaritan woman to show us.

In John 4, Jesus and His disciples go through Samaria. This was unusual. Normally Jews would travel around Samaria. The disciples go to buy food. Jesus

is tired and sits by a well, when a Samaritan woman comes to draw water. He starts up a conversation with her which was also unusual.

John 4:9 The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

During the conversation, Jesus stays on topic. The topic is about Him, that He offers eternal life and living water. Jesus shows her both His omniscience and her need for repentance when He points out that she has had 5 husbands and is now living with a man who is not her husband. She realizes He is a prophet and immediately tries to get Him into a discussion about one of the things dividing Samaritans and Jews.

John 4:19-20 “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

Jesus doesn't take the bait.

John 4:21-24 “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

Jesus keeps the topic on the salvation He will bring because He knows that He is the only one who can end all this petty hostility.

Ephesians 2:14-18 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached

peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

If we look around at our world, country, state and even city, we know we've got problems. They had problems when Jesus walked the earth. Arguing over the best place to worship wasn't going to solve any problems in the 1st century. Arguing over the myriad of issues we disagree on won't solve ours either. Only Jesus breaks down the wall of hostility between enemy groups.

So, we solve the problems by being Jesus to a lost world. We love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. That means we never compromise holiness or obedience to God to please others. In everything we do, we point to Him.

We love our neighbor as ourselves. That means we take the time to show care and love to those in need. We do not, like the religious leaders, pass on the other side to avoid the mess and inconvenience of those who are broken.

We love even when it makes us cringe. When righteousness, holiness, love and mercy go hand in hand, we look like Jesus. An encounter with Jesus is the only thing that will bring healing to the broken.

Questions for Reflection

1. Who is your Samaritan? It may be a co-worker, family member or even a political figure who is aggressively opposed to everything you hold dear. Dedicate the next week to praying for that person.

2. We can all think of a situation where we did not respond well to someone who was opposed to us. In light of this parable and thinking about the way Jesus interacted with the Samaritan woman, how should you have responded in the that situation?

3. This will be a hard prayer to pray. Ask the Lord to give you an opportunity to show mercy this week to someone who is difficult for you.

Now Let's SOAP

What SCRIPTURE stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you OBSERVE about that scripture?

How can you practically APPLY this scripture to your daily living?

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Day 18

Luke 12:16-21 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

¹⁶ And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

¹⁸ "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹ And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

²⁰ "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

²¹ "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

I've got plans. I've got places I want to go on vacation. I have landscaping ideas for my yards. I've got redecorating and remodeling ideas for my house. I have a beat-up Airstream Argosy to fix up. I've got Pinterest boards full of things I want to spend money on. Not one of those things will matter for eternity.

I remember back when I was in junior high school and had just started experimenting with make-up. I had a list of all the different blushes, eyeshadows, lipsticks and eyeliners I wanted to try. I saved and saved my babysitting money. One Saturday, my mom drove me up to Long's Drugstore in Auburn. I had

enough money to buy everything on my list! Driving home with a bag full of all the treasures Seventeen Magazine said I needed, I felt a feeling I had never felt before. I can only describe it as a “what now” feeling. I didn’t have anything else on my list. Little 13-year-old me, for the first time in my life, had everything I wanted. It surprised me to realize that it didn’t feel as great as I thought it would.

We think getting things we want will satisfy. We simultaneously think that giving extravagantly will leave us wanting. Jesus knows that both of those things are lies and He tells us over and over again to live the opposite way. Don’t grasp at the things that won’t last and give extravagantly to the things that will.

I’ve got plans. I want to publish more books. I want to purchase a place to house single moms who have no support. I want to start a podcast to disciple people in real time. I want to be able to move our food ministry to their own warehouse to expand the number of people they provide groceries for each week.

Everything on both of my lists of plans takes time, money and energy. I have to decide how to allocate those limited resources. Of course there is nothing wrong with going on vacation. It’s not sinful to fix up an old Airstream. Actually, there are a lot of spiritual lessons in restoring beauty to something old and broken. But the reality is that those things will not last. What I do to lead people to Jesus, to help them grow in their faith and provide for their needs in the name of the Lord are the things that will last.

Matthew 6:19-21 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Where I decide to allocate most of my resources of time, money and energy will show me where my heart is. In the book of Hebrews, the author commends the Church by saying:

Hebrews 10:34 You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

This verse amazes me. I have a hard time imagining a scenario where I joyfully accept authorities taking my property because I am a Christian. If I really believe scripture, like the early church did, I would know that the few years I have here, with the things that won't last, are nothing compared to what God has planned for me in eternity.

1 Corinthians 2:9 However, as it is written:

**“What no eye has seen,
what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived”¹—
the things God has prepared for those who love him**

When I believe what I say I believe, the spending of my time, money and energy will match. The rich fool thought he had years to enjoy his abundance. Time was not on his side.

We have eternity to spend on a new, perfect earth. It will be magnificent. There will be things to explore, projects to enjoy, skills to learn, friends to spend time with and, best of all, our God to worship face to face. In that sense, we have unlimited time. But, our time here and now is short and needs to be intentional. That doesn't mean we can't enjoy ourselves or have possessions. We can have things for ourselves, but the main focus needs to be riches toward God.

Questions for Reflection

1. Make your lists! It's ok to have both the list of personal things you want to do and the things you want to do for the Kingdom of God. Now intentionally allocate your time, money and energy to reflect that you want to be rich toward God.
2. Are there things you need to remove from your “Personal List” to make more space to accomplish what is on your “Kingdom List”?

3. Did you have trouble coming up with a “Kingdom List”? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a vision and desire for something He wants you to do.

Now Let's SOAP

What SCRIPTURE stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you OBSERVE about that scripture?

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Day 19

Luke 16:1-9 Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ² So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’

³ “The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg— ⁴ I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’

⁵ “So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’

⁶ “‘Nine hundred gallons^[a] of olive oil,’ he replied.

“The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.’

⁷ “Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’

“‘A thousand bushels^[b] of wheat,’ he replied.

“He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’

⁸ “The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to

gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

Well, I'll bet that no one saw this one coming! Is Jesus telling us to be dishonest and cheat those we work for? To find the answer, we will delve a little deeper into this parable to find out the point Jesus was making.

First, it's important to note that scripture sometimes uses the characteristics of ungodly people or things to teach a lesson about a Kingdom principle. We see the picture of a Roman soldier used to teach Christians how to battle. We are called "slaves" to righteousness, even though slavery is condemned in other scriptures. So, the question we need to ask is, what is the Kingdom principle Jesus is commending in this dishonest manager? It's helpful that Jesus answers that question for us in verses 8-9.

⁸ "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹ I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

Working backwards, we know that Jesus isn't commending the manager for being dishonest or embezzling money. He commended the manager for being wise with the use of the master's money, to secure his own future. Let's look at the positive lessons we can learn from the story of the dishonest manager.

We will all be called to give an account. Everything that we have came from God and belongs to God. God WILL ask us to one day give an account of how we spent the breath in our lungs, the strength in our bodies, the ideas in our head and the money in our bank account. We need to make sure we are not wasting what the Master has placed in our charge.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned

up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Our sins are forgiven and there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. But, many Christians forget that scripture teaches that our actions will be judged by fire. There are rewards waiting for those whose works survive. The ones who have only used the master's resources for themselves will suffer loss. I do not want to stand before Jesus, the One who gave everything for me, and simply be saved as one escaping through the flames.

The manager believed the master and got busy. The manager didn't try to plead his case and talk the master out of firing him. He believed what the master said. He looked to his future. He put together a plan of action that was focused on a future return. We just looked at the Parable of the Rich Fool yesterday. Do we believe it? Do we think about the fact that the things we strive for that are not Kingdom oriented are worthless? Do we really believe that when we use the resources the master has given us for His purposes, we are building up treasure that will last for eternity?

Nothing belonged to the manager. The manager was just that, he was to manage someone else's wealth. He ran into trouble when he used that wealth to benefit himself. But, notice that when he began to use his authority to benefit others, the master commended him.

The master was more concerned with the management than the money. Jesus tells us to use worldly wealth to gain "friends" for ourselves. The Greek work "philos" that translates "friends" is connected to the word "phileo" where we get the term "brotherly love". We are to use the master's resources to gain for ourselves brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jesus tells us that the people of the world do a better job at using their resources to gain friends for themselves than we are at using His abundant resources to gain brothers and sisters. We have got to change the way the way we look at the

things God has placed under our management. Surprisingly, it's a dishonest manager who can show us how.

Questions for Reflection

1. Pull out your "kingdom list" from yesterday. Ask the Holy Spirit what resources, that He has given you to manage, should you put toward the items on your "kingdom list".
2. Make a commitment to think about eternity today. Think about how amazing it will be to hear your Savior say, "well done, good and faithful servant!"
3. What do you think 1 Corinthians 3:12 would classify as works that are gold, silver & costly stones? What would works that are wood, hay and straw look like?

Now Let's SOAP

What SCRIPTURE stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you OBSERVE about that scripture?

How can you practically APPLY this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a PRAYER asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

Day 20

Luke 18:1-8 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

⁴ "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Shouldn't we all be like the persistent widow? She won't stop. She has been wronged and wants justice. The Greek word used here is actually a bit stronger. She wants "*ekdikeō*". *Ekdikeō* is a Greek word that means: to vindicate, retaliate, punish, avenge and legally protect someone from another.

She doesn't see anything happening. She comes time after time and goes away without getting what she wants. Her frustration and disappointment don't dissuade her from coming again. She knows that the judge has the power to grant her request, so she keeps at it.

Jesus tells us that this is how we should pray. I'm sure she was full of hope on the first day that she knocked on the judge's door. Her cause was just! He had the authority. She was going to make this happen. Then, nothing. Over and over she came. Still, nothing. We don't know exactly how long she kept coming, but we know that it was long enough to exasperate the judge. He finally gave in. What a joyful day that must have been for her!

Prayer can start out so hopeful. God loves us! He has the power to grant us justice. There are times when I have prayed for something and saw the answer within hours. It's so exciting and makes you feel like God is really listening and cares about you. Then there are things I have been praying years for. That means I have asked for those things thousands of times. I haven't received the answer I'm looking for yet. It can start to feel a little quiet when that happens. You can begin to wonder if prayer even does anything at all. There are a few things you need to do when you find yourself in that same situation.

Remember that God loves you. Verse 7 is such a loving, tender view of God. We can get so focused on our desperation for that thing we're asking for, that we forget to see the ways God is loving us every day. Jesus purposefully contrasts the unjust judge's indifference with God's attentive care. Though their seeming inaction can make them look the same at first, God is nothing like the unjust judge. We serve a God who is inviting us to keep knocking on His door, not irritated at our coming.

1 Peter 5:6-7 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

It's interesting that right after this verse, Peter goes on to say:

1 Peter 5:8-9 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist

him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

There's that adversary. Just as the widow had an adversary, so do we. But unlike the widow, our righteous Judge has already granted us authority and power over our enemy. We need to remember to take the tools of spiritual warfare that God has given us and use them against him.

Once you've reestablished in your heart and mind that you are loved by God and you have taken the authority God has given you over your enemy, keep coming. Keep bringing that thing to God. Even bring your discouragement in the waiting to Him. Don't quit. It takes faith to persevere in prayer when you don't see what you want. Will Christ find faith in you?

Galatians 6:8-9 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Like many portions of scripture there is a "right now" meaning for us and a future meaning for us. Jesus told this parable after being asked about when the kingdom of God would come. He taught about His second coming then went straight into this parable, so we need to also look at it in that light.

There are things we pray for that we may never see the answer to this side of eternity. There is a vengeance and retribution coming, when our Savior returns, that will repay and punish all the powers of darkness for every bit of pain they have caused. We can rest in that and trust God for it. Do we have faith to believe it? Do we have faith to know that the sufferings we endure here are fleeting but the joy in eternity is never ending?

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

The final thing we do when the waiting seems long, is that we look at our circumstances in the light of eternity.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is there anything you have stopped praying for because you got tired of waiting for the answer?
2. Are there things you haven't prayed for because they seem too far out of reach or you're not sure God will care about them?
3. We have established by studying the parables that we are to have a Kingdom mindset and place our focus, energy and resources there. With a Kingdom mindset (not a self-centered one) make a list of the things you want to ask God for this year. Now keep coming and keep asking.

Now Let's SOAP

What SCRIPTURE stood out to you the most?

What is the Holy Spirit having you OBSERVE about that scripture?

How can you practically APPLY this scripture to your daily living?

Write out a PRAYER asking for the Holy Spirit's help to live this out.

Day 21

We did it! We have dwelled with God through prayer, fasting and His word for 21 days. They say it takes 19 days to form a new habit. We threw in a few extra ones for good measure. Don't quit. Just like the persistent widow, keep it up! Day 22 is up to you. As for today, we will see you at church.

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.