

Be Faithful

Text: Luke 12:41-48

Readings: 3 John; Luke 12:35-40; Hebrews 5:11-6:12

Theme: In a parable about a manager of a household Jesus emphasises the need to be faithful in fulfilling our Christian responsibilities.

Purpose: To urge you to serve God faithfully, making the best use of the spiritual privileges you have been given.

The Bible tells us that privilege carries with it much responsibility. This applies to a number of areas. Those who have been given much wealth are obliged to be generous with what they have and to help those in need.

Those who have been given many gifts and talents are to use them to serve others and to glorify God. Those who have been given information and knowledge must use these wisely and well to benefit their family and friends.

Jesus explained this principle when he said, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (v 48).

He illustrated this principle with a parable that contrasted a wise and a foolish manager. The point of the parable is that we need to serve God faithfully making the best use of the spiritual privileges we have been given.

Context: Jesus had just told two other parables. One was about servants who were waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, and the other was about a thief coming to a house.

Both of these preceding parables teach that we do not know when Jesus will return, and that we need to be ready for his coming.

Peter, being the spokesman for the other disciples, asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us or to everyone?" Jesus often taught the people using parables, but when he spoke to his disciples he was more direct. Jesus did not answer Peter's question but instead asked a counter question that introduced another parable.

It is clear from this parable, and from the parallel parable in the gospel of Mark, that Jesus addressed this message to everyone; "what I say to you I say to all: stay awake" (Mark 13:37). All of us need to be awake and alert and ready for the return of Jesus.

The way to be ready is to be faithful. Jesus illustrated this positively first of all by describing a servant who was faithful and was rewarded for this.

1. THE FAITHFUL SERVANT (v 42-44)

He described a master who had a number of servants. He went away for a period of time and he appointed one of his servants to manage the household and the estate while he was away. He obviously chose a servant who was "faithful and wise" (v 42), whom he thought would do the job well. This servant would be a **steward or manager** of the property and would supervise the other servants and provide them their allowance of food at the proper time.

Paul used this term of steward or manager to describe the apostles of the early church (1 Cor 4:1).

What Jesus says about being faithful applies to the leaders of the church, to the shepherds of God's flock. But it also applies to all of us. Every one of us is called to be faithful in serving the Lord Jesus and doing the work he has given us to do.

What is this work? Jesus said, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6:29). To do God's work is to obey his commands, to love him and to serve others. It is "to do whatever is good... to be peaceful and considerate and to show true humility toward all men" (Titus

3:1,8f). We are to do good deeds and so bring praise of our Father in heaven (Matt 5:16). You are to serve Jesus with the knowledge and time and talents the Holy Spirit has given to you.

The apostle John in his third letter commended his friend Gaius for his fine example and for his ministry of hospitality to other Christians, and he praised Demetrius for the good work he was doing.

This is how we are to be living. We are to be faithful in all our work. There are plenty of people who have lots of ideas, and good intentions and things they hope and plan to do for others, but they never come to anything. This parable emphasises the need to be doing, to be working, to be loving. It teaches us, as J C Ryle puts it, “the immense importance of a working, practical, diligent, useful religion.”

Does this describe you and your life and work?

Do you show your faith by your works?

Are you putting your money where your mouth is?

Are you using the talents God has given you?

Are you making good use of the time you have?

Are you seizing the opportunities the Holy Spirit puts in front of you? Are you walking the talk?

When Jesus returns what will he find you doing?

Will he find you being faithful? Do you have “a working, practical, diligent, useful religion?”

If so, then Jesus will **reward you**. Verse 44: “I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.” This is the reward of God’s full and complete salvation, given to all who believe in the Lord Jesus and prove their faith by their good works. This is the enjoyment of the new heaven and the new earth.

In a similar parable in Luke 19 Jesus talked about a master going away and entrusting his servants with money and telling them to put it to work while he was away. To the one he gave 10 minas, which he used it to earn 10 more. The master said to him, “well done my good servant! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter take charge of 10 cities” (Luke 19:17).

In one of the seven letters to the churches in Revelation Jesus wrote to the church in Smyrna, “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10b).

Here is a great encouragement to keep working and to be faithful in everything Jesus gives you to do – one day you will be rewarded.

On that last day when Jesus returns he will give you an inheritance in heaven. You will share in his kingdom and glory on the New Earth. You will receive the crown of life that God has promised to all who love him! Be a faithful servant.

2. THE UNFAITHFUL SERVANT (v 45-46)

Jesus contrasts the faithful servant with one who is unfaithful. The Master put this servant in charge of his household because he thought he was “faithful and wise”.

a. But after the master has been away for some time the servant became **unfaithful**. He said to himself, “My master is taking a long time in coming” (v 45), and he thought he could do as he pleased. He began to beat his fellow servants and so abused his position of authority over the household. And he ate and drank and got drunk; he misused the good gifts his master has given him.

Sadly the history of the church has far too many examples of men and women who have abused the authority God entrusted to them.

During the Renaissance the popes, cardinals and bishops of the Roman Catholic Church slept with women and had mistresses and amassed huge fortunes for themselves. At times their behaviour was worse than that of the secular rulers.

Many of the priests of the Roman Catholic Church have sexually abused the boys in their care and cases of such abuse are still coming to light.

But examples of such abuse and misuse of spiritual authority can also be found in protestant churches, including Reformed churches.

Today there are pastors who are accumulating money for themselves, who have been sexually abusive or sexually promiscuous.

But any so-called Christian can sin in this way. Any one of us can become cold in our faith and careless in our lives. We can develop “a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the Living God”, as did the people of Israel. Be careful that you are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 3:8-12).

b. Jesus warns us about **the punishment** of this unfaithful servant.

Verse 46; “The master of that servant will come on a day he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.” Jesus says the same thing twice over in different ways; he emphasises that his coming will be unexpected.

This reinforces the lesson of the previous parable where Jesus said that you “must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect him” (v 40). One day Jesus will return and each one of us will have to give an account of how we have lived our lives.

Jesus said that the master will cut his servant “in pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers” (v 46b). This is a graphic and terrible description of his fate; it is a description of the punishment of hell. The Bible teaches that unbelievers will live forever to endure the punishment of hell. That is such an awful and terrible prospect that some Christians have taught that unbelievers will be annihilated, but the Bible clearly teaches that hell is a place of eternal suffering.

But Jesus says there will be *degrees* of punishment in hell (v 47 and 48); “That servant who knows his masters will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows.”

All unbelievers will be in hell because of their own sin and ignorance and unbelief. They will be in hell because they rejected the Living Creator God and did not believe in his Son Jesus Christ. But some will carry a greater responsibility, especially those who have grown up in Christian homes, who belonged to the visible church, and who then turned away from Jesus and followed that broad road that leads to destruction.

This is a warning for the children and young people here, and for all of us. Hebrews chapter 6 contains a very solemn and sobering warning against falling away from God and “crucifying the Son of God all over again” (v 6). This will be your situation if you have known about Jesus and then reject him.

On the day of judgment there will be some who were members of the church, even leaders of the church, who will be sent to hell, who will be assigned a place with the unbelievers. These people seemed to have faith but were unfaithful. They professed with their mouths that they believed in Jesus but by their lives they denied him. It is by their fruit that we recognise true believers; i.e. those who love Jesus will obey his commandments.

At another time Jesus warned, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven.” There will be some who claim to be Christians, but on the Day of Judgment Jesus will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers!” (Matt 7:21f)

Could this be you on that Day of Judgment? You might come to church regularly, attend a Bible study, talk like a Christian, but by your life and living deny him. Do you have a living, genuine faith

in the Lord Jesus and are you striving to prove your faith by a godly life and good deeds? Are you always ready for the return of the Lord Jesus and are you looking forward to seeing him? Are you a faithful or unfaithful servant?

Jesus concluded this parable with **a general principle** (verse 48b), “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded, and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”

James applied this principle to teachers in the church when he wrote in his letter (3:1), “Not many of you should presume to be teachers my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.” This is a sobering truth and one that pastors and elders need to keep in mind all the time.

But this principle of Jesus applies to all of us.

With knowledge comes greater obligation.

The more you know the more will be required of you.

The greater your spiritual privileges the greater your responsibility.

This is an appropriate conclusion to this parable. You and I are called to be faithful to God and to make the best use of the spiritual privileges the Holy Spirit has given to us so that we may be ready for Christ’s return.

Are you being faithful?

Are you active in the church and kingdom of Jesus?

Are you ready for his return?

Amen