



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 25A (P28)

November 15, 2026

[RCL] Judges 4:1-7; Psalm 123; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; **Matthew 25:14-30**

Opening Prayer |

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Context |

This week's passage from Matthew contains yet another of Jesus's more startling parables. Often referred to as "the parable of the talents," it illustrates a man's reaction to different ways that his slaves have handled money entrusted to them for safe-keeping while he is away. Within the context of Matthew, this parable follows immediately after the parable about the ten bridesmaids and just before Jesus speaks about the coming of the Son of Man. So this parable fits within Jesus's discourse about preparing the disciples for what is about to happen, i.e. his death on the cross. Divine judgment and violent consequences continue to be significant themes in this portion of Matthew, and both would have been ever-present in the minds of the author's original audience of Jewish refugees in Antioch following the destruction of Jerusalem.

As Jesus draws closer to his arrest, condemnation, and death, the sense of urgency in his teaching is growing. Verse 29 of this passage drives home the point that shows up throughout Matthew: a small amount of understanding now will go a long way for the disciples as they carry out their ministries while waiting for Jesus to return. It is fitting that we hear this parable during the final week of this Pentecost season, our own period of training and preparation for discipleship.

Theological Reflection |

The complexity of this parable—along with the rich descriptions of its characters—provides a great example of the importance of reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting Holy Scripture. There are layers of meaning in this narrative, so it may take several readings of it to fully extract the teaching needed to support modern-day disciples. The character of the master is one to study and consider thoroughly. In one interpretation, the master can easily serve as an allegory for the Triune God, a generous overseer who both provides and hands down judgment. But where does the comparison of the master to God work for teaching, and where does it fall short?

It is important for us to pay attention to why the master rewards the first two slaves. He does not specify that his satisfaction comes from the specific amount of additional profit they make for him. Nor does it seem he gives a reward respective to their level of productivity.

Instead, he tells them the same thing: You took a chance to please me a little, so I will give you more. Perhaps this master's invitation to enter into his joy was an invitation to join him in his mindset of abundance. Like the master, God also invites us to participate in the work of abundant miracle making using the gifts that God provides for us.

The master's seemingly harsh treatment of the final slave can be a troubling element for readers today. But it is important to remember that the conditions within Jesus's parables are often said to be compared to the conditions in heaven, not equal to them. The difference between this hypothetical master and God is that God's ultimate judgment of our choices is also coupled with God's bestowal of grace and mercy to those who repent as the final slave did.

The modern-day reader may wonder about the final slave's punishment of being thrown into "the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 14:30). If God is merciful, then what does that mean for those today who choose to hide away the spiritual gifts granted to them? What about those who ignore the knowledge they have of Jesus instead of sharing it with others? How are we to understand the threat of "outer darkness"? Maybe outer darkness becomes a life of isolation, the experience of feeling lost and untethered. After all, this is the opposite of what a life in Christ promises.

The good news is that there is always an open invitation to make a different choice. It is easy for us to understand the fear of the final slave, which governs his choices. Fear is a natural emotion, especially understandable when paired with uncertainty about the future. But this parable encourages us not to let our fear inhibit the growth of the church or the reach of God's grace. To be prepared for the Son of Man to arrive means to be quick to share the abundance of God's blessings with others. To grow the blessings we have received into a gift that magnifies them. This parable teaches one sign of faithful discipleship: to share what you have—skills, knowledge, faith—so that all may have some.

Reflection Questions |

- Have you ever been entrusted with an item or a task while someone was away? What was it like to wait, not knowing how that person would react when they returned? How did it feel for you to bear that responsibility?
- Do you relate more to the actions and interpretations of the first two slaves or the final one? Which one more closely reflects the way you use your God-given talents today?
- Reflect on a time when you or your community overcame the fear of not having enough. What helped you get through that experience?

Faith in Practice |

Take an inventory of the blessings God has granted you in your life. Make a list, and include people, resources, experiences, wisdom, personality traits, and anything else you can think of. Choose a few items on your list, and make a plan for how you can share those blessings with someone else in the coming week.

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