

Jesus: Ordering Everything Towards Forgiveness

14 "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants³ and entrusted to them his property. 15 To one he gave five talents,⁴ 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.' - Matthew 25:21-30 (ESV)

In the Name of Jesus,

AMEN.

Once again, when we hear our Lord speak in parables, as he so often taught, and at first hearing we are always tempted to hear, not Christ crucified for the sinner, but what we must DO to inherit eternal life. This is the constant question of the natural or sinful man, who is always earning, striving, competing, deceiving himself about his progression, and looking to what must be done, to get ahead, to succeed and to clean himself up. The same question that Jesus was asked by the rich young ruler a few chapters earlier in Matthew's gospel as well as, is how our Old Man strives and postures to clean himself, or make himself acceptable to God. Our Old man hears Jesus words with the question in mind "What must I DO to inherit eternal life?" Luther referred to this as a Theology of glory. And yet in the catechism we confess in explaining the 3rd Article of the Creed that we believe "that we CANNOT by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him", It is Jesus who answers these questions of our working or inheriting eternal life as impossibility for man.

¹⁸ And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁹ And Jesus said to him,

"Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" ²¹ And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." ²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²³ But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. ²⁴ Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God." (Luke 18:18-27)

So, in hearing our text, we must remember that our natural man, reading Jesus' parables wants to understand them in accordance with what WE must do, making them about us, and yet the mystery of the parables, as Jesus explained to His disciples

"To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God," said Jesus, ***"but to those who are outside, all things come in parables."*** (Mark 4:11)

As Paul explains the revelation of this mystery:

we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained.
(1Corinthians 2:7)

The mystery is revealed to us is Jesus, crucified for the sinner.

Jesus explains this further on the Emmaus road after His resurrection where He teaches His disciples beginning at the Old Testament and shows us how all Scripture is to be understood and heard, *"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."* Luke 24:27 ESV

So, our key to rightly understanding this parable about workers, two of whom have invested money and gotten a return, and a third who buried and mistreated his gift, yielding no return, is not an understanding about stewardship, economics, money or even how we are to live, or what we must "DO" to inherit eternal life. If the parable were about these things we could just as easily learn from a book on business or investment. In the churches I grew up in, I often heard this parable taught in terms of God's blessing and how to move ahead in your job, by being faithful in the little things, so that God would eventually reward you with more responsibility and a better job. *"You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much"* was often horribly misquoted and misused, as this also cannot be what is being taught here. The catechism reminds us in the 1st Article of the Creed that everything we have is not earned, but given by God as gift *"all out of pure, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me."*

In rightly hearing Jesus in our text today, this parable is about the forgiveness of sins. It is about the Jesus dying for sins of the world. It is Jesus dying for you. Just as in the parable with the 3rd servant, it is the Old man of the flesh who buries this gift of forgiveness and instead turns everything into a means to

justify himself, and yet Jesus freely distributes and multiplies His forgiveness in ways that don't even make mathematical sense. Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:17) Jesus freely gives Himself, His body and blood in Holy Communion, His word of forgiveness is given in Holy Absolution and His Word of gospel preached and spoken, and in Holy Baptism where He washes the sinner clean as far as the east is from the west.

Jesus has given His Word and His sacraments for His church to freely distribute His Gospel of the forgiveness of sins to whole world, to every nation and people. Jesus invests Himself and brings forth abundant return. While the Old Man of the flesh seeks to bury this gift and even reject it, Jesus is freely forgiving the weak and wounded, sick and needy, the failure, the prostitute, the crook, and the murderer, as this is what He does and what He gives you. He is forgiving and making you holy with His gifts and generously giving His gift of forgiveness, as we hear and confess in the Large Catechism.

Everything in the Christian Church is ordered toward this goal: we shall daily receive in the Church nothing but the forgiveness of sins through the Word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. So even though we have sins, the grace of the Holy Spirit does not allow them to harm us. We are in the Christian Church, where there is nothing but continuous, uninterrupted forgiveness of sin. This is because God forgives us and because we forgive, bear with, and help one another.

But outside the Christian Church, where the Gospel is not found, there is no forgiveness, as also there can be no holiness.

In the Name of Jesus,

AMEN.