

A Double Portion
Matthew 25:14-30
Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
November 15, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, another Last-Day parable, which Jesus begins, “The kingdom of heaven will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

For the second week in a row we hear that “It (the kingdom of heaven) *will be* like...” which reminds us that Jesus is turning our attention to what *will be*, but is not yet seen: namely, His glorious return. Before we get to that, consider for a moment the great comfort in hearing Jesus say “the kingdom of heaven *will be* like.” That should bring great comfort to you about all those previous parables in Matthew 13, that we heard earlier this summer, all those parables that begin “The kingdom of heaven *is* like.” In light of what Jesus says here, “The kingdom of heaven *will be* like,” you should – from now on – always take great joy that the phrase “the kingdom of heaven *is* like” means that is what is yours right now. How often we hear “the kingdom of heaven” and think of something distant and future-tense and non-chronological. But, in those parables, we should cling to the present tense promise, “The kingdom of heaven *is* like.” God’s grace toward you, worked in and through Christ Jesus and poured out upon you by His Holy Spirit through Word and

Sacrament – all of that happening *right now*, Jesus says – is like “this.” What joy!

As much as we should hear the present-tense comfort in “the kingdom of heaven *is* like,” we should also hear the future-tense “stay awake” exhortation in Jesus’ beginning of these parables, “The kingdom of heaven *will be* like.”

Last week’s parable of “anticipation of the Last Day” (the ten virgins) focused on being prepared and nurtured and sustained in life to die in faith, that we may awake to the coming Bridegroom well-prepared for the feast. This morning, another “Last-Day” parable... this one not focusing as much on the suddenness of Christ’s return as much as it focuses on what Christ expects to find when He returns in His glory.

Have you ever considered that? That Christ *expects* to find something all about you when he returns in his glory? Do we sometimes convince ourselves that Christ simply says, “Oh, I know so-and-so is faithful, so who cares if I find him riddling his life with sins of commission or slothfully passing the time with sins of omission”? No, rather this parable makes quite clear that Christ expects something of us. So, what is it?

Consider that he entrusts to us, his servants, his *property*. What is the property of Jesus? If his kingdom is not of this world, how can the property of his kingdom be of this world? Jesus promises to share with us all the inheritance, all the riches, all the

treasures of heaven – the kingdom of heaven *is* currently (present-tense) like this, where he showers us with his Word and Sacraments, and forgiveness and faith and holy living found therein.

Thus, when he entrusts to us his property, we should think of those treasures as heavenly, not as earthbound... as Word and Sacrament, faith and forgiveness; not as daily bread and success and health and temporal joys.

The parable says to one he entrusted five talents, to another two, to another one, each according to his ability. Ought we start comparing who has been given more by Christ? Ought we compare material wealth, length of life, number of children, contentment of days? That would be foolish. The servants do not compare in jealousy, perhaps because the gifts that Christ gives us, that which he entrusts to us, cannot be seen by one another, cannot be measured by each other. How are you supposed to measure my faith, or me measure your works done in faith? How are we to measure one's benefit from the Word and Sacraments, other than to rejoice together that we all receive from the divine treasures all that we need. If one of us needs "five portions" of grace (whatever that would even mean), so be it – here is forgiveness for you! If one of us needs "two portions" of grace (again, whatever that would even mean... I just use it for the sake of the argument), fine – here you go – we all rejoice that Christ has given you to benefit by such gracious property that comes to you from the master's table. There's not

pride in receiving five, just as there's no pride in "only needing" to receive one. We all receive what God knows we need to sustain us in faith and in eager anticipation of the glorious day of Christ's return.

But, the point of the parable is not how much we've each been given. The point is that two of the three servants take the master to be a *gracious* master (certainly in light of the cross!) and thus make the most of such gracious share of the property, that they might share in his joy at the time of settling accounts; while, one of the servants does not see the master to be gracious (rejects the news of the cross), but hard and demanding, and so that servant mistrusts his share of the property. *That's* the point of the text.

Indeed, if there's one "point of symmetry" between the first two servants, it's that both could give account on the Day of the Lord that what he had given them had *doubled*. From five to ten, or from two to four – the benefit is the same: a double-portion. And that double portion is *theirs, for their benefit*. True, they each said, "here I have made five/two more" (as if giving back the profit); but Jesus makes clear at the end of the parable that the master chooses to "take the talent from (the slothful servant) and give it to him who *has* the ten talents." Yes, the double-portion was not *repaid* to the master, but was enjoyed as benefit by the faithful servants.

Isn't this a constant theme of God's grace throughout the Scriptures: By God's grace, Job is given a double-portion. By God's grace, the prophet Isaiah reports to the faithful, "Instead of your

shame you will have a double portion, and instead of humiliation they will shout for joy over their portion. Therefore they will possess a double portion in their land; everlasting joy will be theirs” (61:7). Indeed, by God’s grace, the prophet Zechariah calls out, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Behold your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation... and saying, ‘Today, I declare that I will restore to you double.’ (9:9, 12)

Indeed, when Christ came to the cross, he did so as the firstborn of God, the firstborn to whom all the inheritance of double-portion is promised, but that same Christ freely promised to share it with you... to share his *property* with you... to give you a share in the double-portion inheritance of salvation and all the gifts of paradise. And, now, in this very parable before us, Jesus paints the picture and says, “Yes, believe me, the double portion is yours. Salvation is yours. The full inheritance of heaven is yours. Live holy lives in faith of that. Rejoice in that. Eagerly anticipate that... for you will see it by sight when I come again in my glory.”

But, not all *do* take heart in it or live in faith of it, or eagerly anticipate it. The third servant in Jesus’ parable is slothful and lazy because he thinks poorly of the master. (We might interpret that as “lazy in the matters of God,” living a secular life, asleep in sin.) And he, when he is called to account, confesses no faith in the master, but only distrust of him: “I knew you to be a hard man... reaping what you do not sow, gathering where you did not scatter seed.”

The master responds in exasperated disbelief: “Really?! Is that how you knew me? Is that what you think of me? From where did you get that notion?”

To be sure, from where? Did not the parables of the kingdom of heaven earlier in Matthew teach us that Jesus sows the gospel liberally, scatters the seed of the Kingdom without hesitation or reservation, in the good soil, bad soil, along the path... wherever the wind blows, so blows the Holy Spirit in scattering the seed of the Gospel. How in the world can this slothful servant say the Lord does not sow, but only seeks to reap for selfish gain? (How can the unfaithful see the Church as a place of legalism, “hate speech,” and money-grubbing institutional self-preservation?) How can the servant know God to be a hard man when the Lord showed an entire Old Covenant forbearance, passing over former sins until his own appointed salvific substitute went to the cross to pay the sinners’ debt? How can the slothful servant be *afraid* of the good and merciful God?

But, like all other sinners, this third servant was begotten in the image and likeness of Old Adam (and, without using God’s gifts for the *New Adam*, remained in the mindset of the *Old Adam*), who said of hearing the good and gracious Lord walking through the garden in the moments after the Fall, “I was afraid, so I hid myself.” *Afraid of God? Afraid of the Holy One who had made us perfect and granted us all things? How can this be? Only because Adam had*

plunged himself into sin and his shameful nakedness was accompanied by a warped mind. Yes, how often we believe that the effects of sin are known in the body or in the world, but we forget that the very first effect of sin as recorded in Genesis is the effect of the fallen mind/psyche: “I was afraid, so I hid”... hid from God. For false doctrine and bad theology (a poor ‘knowledge of God’) has already crept in, filling the mind (and the heart) with faithlessness that seeks to blame God for our sin and thus – to justify one’s self – blames God as the author of our unrighteousness and a master of tyranny and anger.

“I knew you to be a hard man,” the servant says; “I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.” Notice, friends, the non-use of the divine gifts of God... the burying what is his and giving it back to him... that’s not a matter merely of indifference; it’s a matter of rejection. The one who thinks it’s “no harm, no foul” to simply ignore the things of God is not guilty of mere complacency, but of outright dismissal of God’s promises and denunciation of His gifts. (There’s no neutrality in complacency!) How often we try to rationalize regarding the one who rejects the things of God, “Oh, he’s a pretty good person, he just isn’t interested in churchly things.” No, that one is rejecting God’s gifts, labeling God a fraud and a liar, and confessing to all the world that God is a hard master, a self-serving Savior, who demands of His people rather than freely gives to His people.

How should we *expect* the holy God to respond to that? As a defeated parent who shrugs as the spoiled child rules the roost? Or, will God not respond according to his holiness and righteousness, settling accounts with that wicked servant, no longer under the cover of grace and a double-portion showered among the faithful, but settling accounts by stripping the wicked servant of all self-merit by which that servant believed himself able to stand?: The master says, "From the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." In other words, "From the one who has no faith, even the meritorious works he *thinks* he has will be burned away like chaff." Yes, those who think God a cruel master are those who seek to justify themselves by their actions, works, daily life of self-righteousness. But that faux covering for sin will be taken away, and they will learn to regret that they had seen the master as such a hard man when he had formerly been so merciful and longsuffering, but now deals with them in true severity: "Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Let us heed the lesson carefully, that we may never mimic the complacency painted in Zephaniah's prophecy, that complacency the Lord roots out and condemns when he says, "At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill.'"

Notice what the Lord says there: It's those who think the Lord is not merciful who also think the Lord knows no vengeance. But we know the Lord is justified in his wrath toward the unbelieving *precisely because* he is a merciful God, and his mercy they have rejected. May it never be so that we grow complacent toward (and, thus, reject) God's mercy in Christ Jesus!

Consider that mercy, depicted right in the middle of this Law-heavy (again, like last week's) parable... did we not hear of it? Have we not already considered it?: *double-portion*. All the riches of forgiveness, life, and salvation that God should have only bestowed upon the Son, the *one* righteous, the firstborn over all creation... all of those riches that should have been reserved exclusively as *his* inheritance (for He alone took to the cross), the Son has freely shared with us second-sons. He has freely given his life, freely poured out his blood, freely stayed the Father's rightful anger, freely given himself as the substitute sacrifice... that same long-promised Messiah, the news of His coming "saturating" God's original response to the Fall, when sinful Adam hid in fear from God (whom he suddenly knew to be a hard man and even *blamed* him for giving Eve and, implicitly, for causing the Fall)... yet, God – rich in mercy and lovingkindness – did not cast Adam out in naked shame and eternal death, but filled Adam's ears with words of gospel, words of a coming Messiah who would win the victory by crushing the serpent's head.

That first Gospel in the garden is the everlasting Gospel that has defined all of human history. It is that everlasting Gospel that proclaims the everlasting testimony that our God is no hard man, but is the gracious and merciful God who scatters the seed of that same gospel all throughout the world and sows the good news of that same Gospel right into our hearts and even grows us up in that gospel, so that – as we live our lives in and according to it – what growth is ours, what good days are ours, what joy is ours – that, at the end of earth’s days, we have a full and abundant and overflowing inheritance as He sets us over even more, granting us a portion in Christ’s inheritance, a crown like His crown, a seat at the divine Table, and a share in the new creation. Christ is surely coming, bringing his reward... a double-portion of God’s blessing.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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