

Hope in the Shadowlands

Tim Miller, Gateway Fellowship, Dec 3, 2017

Matthew 25:14-30 NLT 14 “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. **15** He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip.

16 “The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. **17** The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. **18** But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master’s money.

19 “After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. **20** The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, ‘Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more.’

21 “The master was full of praise. ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together! [b]’

22 “The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest, and I have earned two more.’

23 “The master said, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let’s celebrate together!’

24 “Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, ‘Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn’t plant and gathering crops

you didn't cultivate. **25** I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.'

26 "But the master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn't plant and gathered crops I didn't cultivate,**27** why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.'

28 "Then he ordered, 'Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver. **29** To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. **30** Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

And now Zechariah's words to John the Baptist, his son...

Luke 1:76-79 "And you, my little son,
 will be called the prophet of the Most High,
 because you will prepare the way for the Lord.
77 You will tell his people how to find salvation
 through forgiveness of their sins.
78 Because of God's tender mercy,
 the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,^[i]
79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
 and to guide us to the path of peace."

Advent - The Shadowlands

- Today is the **1st day of the season of advent**, which is the preparation season for Christmas just like Lent is the preparation season for Easter. Easter coincides with the coming of spring after the long dormant season of death and loss. Christmas comes as the first rays of that hope - but into the cold dark weariness of a world that simultaneously longs for true life, and fears it.
- I find it interesting that so many of us **associate the Christmas holiday season with contrasts**, the joy of family and the God who draws near and makes himself vulnerable, knowable, close, AND it's also the season of lost dreams, loved ones, winter doldrums, financial pressures, family obligations, and identity crisis. To many walking through grief, christmas is one of the hardest seasons.

Advent, I think perfectly positions itself to help us walk through both. The waiting. The longing. The darkness. The cold. And the promise. The hope. The light. The warmth of God on his way to make his home with us, never to leave.

- **John the Baptist had a ministry of preparation for Jesus.** His job was to show up before Jesus and clear the trees from the site, dig the foundation, put everything in order so that Jesus can be received correctly as the foundation. John's ministry was clearing things away, which is different from actually building the home or moving in.
- **I really like Advent is because I relate so strongly** to the emotional and seasonal aspects of it. We're yearning for Messiah to come and Zechariah says Jesus comes, "As the dawn breaking from heaven, giving light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide us to the path of peace." So vivid. And for me with my extreme emotional sensitivity to light, so true. The season of shadows and gray. The season of trying to remember, "Wait, what's my hope?" The season of fighting to stay awake while I'm alive and not retreat to hibernation or distraction. Some of us are very skilled at fooling ourselves with activities that seem productive but what we're really doing is retreating from full orb'd faith because living that whole hearted got us hurt before, so now we are more careful. Now we diversify our heart's investments. We no longer seek first the kingdom. We just seek the kingdom a little too, at the end of the rest of our seeking, because who needs the drama?
- **We rehearse both the waiting and the arriving.** Waiting for Jesus to come, and him arriving. And we rehearse these events, not merely to remember them. No, we rehearse them because we are in them. We rehearse them to remind ourselves of the actual story we find ourselves in. We are living as the chosen people who are loved, but who are waiting for Messiah. We are waiting with hope, but also much of the time fighting to keep hope in view, keep the faith, to steward our lives while the Master is, in some sense, away.
- And that is what I really want us to think about today. Stewarding our little hearts in the middle of the waiting, steward our hope in the light in the middle of the darkness. Stewarding our little hope while we wait for it to become big.

Awake Stewards

- **The guy no one wants to be.** The one who was unfaithful was actually reacting to the newfound responsibilities of the gift. The gift triggered cortisol, which triggered a stress response, which then caused him to react and retreat.
- The others **carefully stewarded a vision of what was possible.** Threats to the vision can powerfully disrupt the attitudes which found the actions that lead to the victory. But these other two servants kept their faith in the midst of the

challenges, which enabled positive action and resilience. The outcome was sharing even more fully in the master's work and the master's joy.

- **So does faith comes first or action comes first?** I don't know.

The earliest disciples didn't think themselves into a new way of living, they lived themselves into a new way of thinking. (Brian McLaren)

- **Guard the gates.** Attitude is everything. Belief is everything. So taking a proactive approach to selectively weeding out and seeding in the things you want to our minds is critical.
- **Daily Routines.** They say to not check your phone for the first hour of the day, lest you get into a cycle of brain chemicals responding to what others are saying, what's in the news, what's in the inbox, what's in the feed, instead of moving from your values toward your goals.
- **Habits** are one of the most powerful tools we have to hack our lives out of passivity and reaction into proactivity and creation.
- **Consumers vs Creators.** The line is blurred, of course, because genius is found not in creation out of nothing, but in assembling or connecting things that already exist into something that is uniquely yours.
- **Lose yourself in the music.** The creative flow is not self aware, it is work aware. And that's liberating. Challenging enough to require focus, but achievable enough to reward the incremental efforts along the way.
- **Architecture that's productivity-centered.** No guitar cases. Bibles open and out.
- **Whack-a-mole.** Taking every thought captive is not a game of whack-a-mole. That's actually living defensively, hunting for what's wrong.
- **The fight you're really in.** Whatever is causing stress and fear is usually the important battle we are actually in, which we wish we weren't in. If we resent that we're in it, we automatically are on our heels and turn toward self-defeating patterns of thought. If we realize that God is allowing it for our upgrade. If we realize that we can learn to do things we cannot yet do. If we realize that God gives grace to adapt and improve and that here and now, this present moment, is when Christ-in-me is actually relevant, then I can begin to receive positive patterns of thought and belief that are in life with the Spirit.
- **Gratitude** is the Spirit's dominant mindset. The shift toward gratitude is almost always the turning point of the battle. With gratitude comes the relaxation and peace that enables the brain to problem solve, troubleshoot, and own responsibility for taking wise action.

Colossians 1:4-5 4 For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people, 5 which come from your confident hope of what God has reserved for you in heaven.

- **Hope stored up in heaven.** This doesn't mean when you're dead you get it. This means nothing on earth can take it. It's like money in the bank that you can draw from whenever you need it until the day when you totally cash out.

Isaiah 40:31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

- **Maybe right now** you can't even run. But you can get up. Maybe you can't run right now, but you can start walking. Maybe you can't fly right now, but you can run. And maybe somebody in here can start flying, they just need permission. But no matter where you are, in the Lord, there's hope, and if you have hope, even the smallest hope, it plants in you like a seed and gives birth to the eyes of your heart having something worth living for, walking toward. Get. Back. Up. Hope in God!
- **Ineffective and half alive...**

The ministry is one of the most perilous of professions. The devil hates the Spirit-filled minister with an intensity second only to that which he feels for Christ himself. The source of this hatred is not difficult to discover. An effective, Christlike minister is a constant embarrassment to the devil, a threat to his dominion, a rebuttal of his best arguments and a dogged reminder of his coming overthrow. No wonder he hates him.

Satan knows that the downfall of a prophet of God is a strategic victory for him, so he rests not day or night devising hidden snares and deadfalls for the ministry. Perhaps a better figure would be the poison dart that only paralyzes the victim, for I think satan has little interest in killing the preacher outright. An ineffective, half-alive minister is a better advertisement for hell than a good man dead...(A.W. Tozer)

- **"An ineffective, half alive follower of Jesus."** Paul said, "we're not ignorant of satan's schemes." This is one. You know that's the target on your back too. "Half alive. Ineffective." Which targets God's highest intention for us - abundant life, overflowing with hope, rooted and grounded in love.

Planted by the gates of hope

I have a friend who traffics in words. She is not a minister, but a psychiatrist in the health clinic at a prestigious women's college. We were sitting once not long after a student she had known, and counseled, committed suicide in the dormitory there. My friend, the doctor, the healer, held the loss very closely in those first few days, not unprofessionally, but deeply, fully — as you or I would have, had this been someone in our care.

At one point (with tears streaming down her face), she looked up in defiance (this is the only word for it) and spoke explicitly of her vocation, as if out of the ashes of that day she were renewing a vow or making a new covenant (and I think she was). She spoke explicitly of her vocation, and of yours and mine. She said, "You know I cannot save them. I am not here to save anybody or to save the world. All I can do — what I am called to do — is to plant myself at the gates of Hope. Sometimes they come in; sometimes they walk by. But I stand there every day and I call out till my lungs are sore with calling, and beckon and urge them in toward beautiful life and love..."

--Victoria Stafford

What we are all called to do is plant ourselves by the gates of Hope.