

Day 8 Stewards for the End Time

“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matthew 25:13).

The year 2020 will undoubtedly go down in history as the year of the deepest crisis in recent times. People ask many questions these days. Here are some of them: Is the crisis that we are going through a sign of the end? Is there much time left before Christ returns? What else does the future hold for us?

To answer these questions, let us open the Bible to the Saviour’s last sermon, which we can find in all the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—but not John. The disciple John does not record this sermon, but he wrote the book of Revelation, which deals with this same subject.

Of the three Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of Matthew presents the last sermon of Jesus in a complete form. It dominates most of two chapters (Matthew 24, 25). Jesus parallels the scenario of the destruction of Jerusalem with the final events of His return, as the assurance of the fulfilment of the last act in human history, His return in glory.

If we look at the structure of the Sermon on the Mount of Olives, we see that Jesus first speaks of the signs of His return, then of the need to watch for them. But most of the sermon is devoted to the way we should wait and be ready for His return. This is obvious by the way He corrects the disciples’ question, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and the end of this age?” (Matthew 24:3). Jesus answers, “Take heed that no one deceives you” (Matthew 24:4). He wants to tell the disciples that the most important question is not when, but how they should be prepared. To help the disciples and those waiting throughout the ages to understand what it means to be ready, Jesus tells four parables. We call them the “expectation parables,” but they also can be called the “stewardship parables,” because they illustrate the fundamental principles of

stewardship. The short answer to the question of what it means to be ready for Jesus’ return, according to the sermon, is to be a true steward, one to whom the Lord can say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

In the first parable, Jesus shows that watching and being ready is reflected in how we treat those around us. One day we will give an account of this. In the second parable, Jesus speaks of a possible delay. Watching involves a relationship with God that sustains us, even if He does not come when we think He should come. In the next parable, watching means to use all the capacities and opportunities offered to expand the borders of His kingdom. In the last parable, that of the sheep and the goats, watching means to be willing to serve. Space does not allow us to talk about each parable. For this reason, I will discuss only the third, the parable of the talents.

We Have a Generous God

The disciples gather around the Saviour and continue to listen to one of the most important sermons they have had the opportunity to hear. The kingdom of heaven, Jesus said, “is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and entrusted His goods to them” (Matthew 25:14). This truth should be repeated again and again, that all that we are and have is only entrusted to us; it belongs to God. Only in this way will we be able to have a correct perspective of God, ourselves, and the meaning of life. Watching and waiting for the Saviour’s return is not an event. It is a lifestyle based on the truth that everything belongs to God and must be used in harmony with His will. The apostle Paul’s question should always dominate our thinking: “What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Three servants were given the responsibility of

administering the entire wealth of their master: eight talents. What the disciples understood from Jesus' words may be different from how we understand the meaning of the word "talent" today. The talent at that time was not a monetary unit, but a measure of weight. It could weigh between 25 and 35 kilograms (55-77 pounds). A silver talent was the equivalent of 6,000 dinars, or 15 years of work. So, one talent was worth a fabulous sum. From the talent in the parable came our word "talent," which means the endowments or abilities that a person might have.

Jesus' primary purpose through this parable is not to teach us a lesson in financial management. Jesus wants to say that the kingdom of heaven only resembles the administration of money. Each servant received according to his own "ability" (Matthew 25:15), or capacity. One thing is for sure: everyone received much more than they could have earned or owned. The lord of the servants also expresses his generosity through the trust he shows them.

For our understanding, a talent can represent any gift received from God, everything we have, everything we are, every moment, every day, the financial resources, family, and social relationships—everything we have is because of His grace.

God also opens opportunities to serve, through which we can do something extraordinary for Him. No one has reason to complain that he did not receive any opportunities. God has invested so much in each of us. Everything that follows in this parable happens because of the different perspective the stewards have of their master. Perhaps we should make a daily list, as did David (Psalms 103), of God's blessings and praise Him for who He is, a God full of generosity.

Different Attitudes Toward the Master

The first two stewards appreciate their master, and therefore they do not behave like servants, but as his true partners. They "immediately"

(Matthew 25:15) invested everything they had received and thus increased its value. Every time we read this parable, our attention turns to the third servant, who "went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money" (verse 18). At first sight, there seems to be nothing wrong with what he did. He did not waste his master's resources. On the contrary, he sought a way to make sure he could fully repay all that he had received. In this case, we wonder, Why is the punishment so harsh? Maybe firing him would have been enough.

Let's not forget the purpose for which Jesus told this parable. He does not address the crowd; He speaks to the disciples, those who asked Him about the end of this world. Once again, Jesus emphasises the need for vigilance and shows what it means to be vigilant. In the previous parables as well, the master and the bridegroom returned. Here the same theme appears again. Jesus mentions that there will be a delay when He used the expression "after a long time" the master returned. The certainty of return is accentuated again. We do not know when He will come, but we know that He will return. And when He returns, He will do one thing: He will "settle accounts" (verse 19) of what we have done with what has been entrusted to us. Such a generous God has every right to do so. However, why does He settle accounts? He gave the unused talent to the one who had ten talents. God has only one expectation from us: to grow in the likeness of Him, and become generous with what has been entrusted to us. We are either generous as God is or stingy, and see Him as stingy as well.

These are the words of the unfaithful servant: "Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid" (Matthew 25:24, 25). If we do not have a correct perspective of God, we will not wait for Him to return, and our life will be dominated by fear (verse 25). Fear has a paralysing effect, negatively affecting the experiences of vigilance and waiting. And yet, why such a harsh punishment? Jesus is not talking about money here, but about His kingdom. He did everything

to make His kingdom a reality; to expand it and to embrace as many souls as possible. This is the role of the church, the responsibility of each of us. For this reason His precious blood was shed on the cross. To be careless with such a calling means to be a “wicked and lazy” servant (verse 26). The church is not just a place in which to feel good or to bury the talents you receive. Not putting to work what we have received through the enormous cost of the sacrifice at Calvary is wickedness and rebellion against God. Ellen White says, “Christ’s followers have been redeemed for service. Our Lord teaches that the true object of life is ministry.”¹

These parables remind us that no matter how rich or modest the received talents are, they are all important to God’s plans. The parable of the talents shows that the most important thing is not how much we have received (the reward is the same for everyone), but what we do with what we have.

Stewards in the End Time

Is the crisis that gripped the world in the year 2020 a sign of the end? The answer is definitely “Yes.” We have been in the time of the end since the period of the early church, says the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:11. But how much time is left until Christ’s return is what we do not know. Not even the angels know (Matthew 24:36). Precisely for this reason, we are advised to watch and be ready. What will happen to us then, depends on what we do today. This is the message of Jesus.

There is another aspect to consider. The state of being ready is not what saves us. Salvation, from beginning to end, is because of His grace. The state of being ready or watchful shows whether we have received God’s grace in our lives. The Saviour’s parable tells us that this immense capital, which is His grace, must be invested and used to expand His kingdom. The first two servants knew how to watch and be prepared for the master’s return and could look him in the eyes with joy. They invested what they had received.

Pastor Randy Roberts in the book *Waiting and Longing* says:

“Have you ever thought what vigilance means? First of all, take it for what it literally meant to the first hearers, when a talent symbolised money. So one of the first ways to watch is using your money in ways that further the goals of the Kingdom of God.

“Have you ever realised that when the offering plate comes down your row at church and you drop in your tithe and your offerings, that you are not just giving for the church? No, you are watching, watching for the coming of Christ. Have you ever realised that when the hat is passed for a needy family, and you help bear the burden, you are not just giving something to help the needy? No, you are watching for the coming.

“But we must also appropriately broaden the meaning of talent to include not only the money, but to also include the responsibilities, gifts, talents, and abilities that God gives to each one of us. And when we do that, we realise that every day of our lives can be characterised by watching.

“When outstanding musicians lead worshippers in majestic praise; when the choir and orchestra use what they have been given to lift the hearts of God’s people heavenward, it is tempting just to say, ‘Thank you for using your talents.’ . . . But please understand that on a much deeper level, as they increase the Kingdom of God, they are watching. Watching for the coming.

“When children learn of the truths of the kingdom in children’s programs, they are the beneficiaries of the people who are using their talents to increase the kingdom in their little lives. And so we will say, ‘Thank you for using your talents.’ But beyond that do not miss the fact that these leaders are not just serving the children. No, they are watching. Watching for the coming of the King.”²

The greatest blessing one can enjoy is to hear on the day of His return the words: “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful

1 Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 326.

2 Randy Roberts, *Waiting and Longing for Jesus* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2011), p. 86.

over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:21). Remember, by God's grace, strive not to be a successful servant, but rather a good and faithful servant, made ruler over a few things. We are not called to accomplish anything sensational, but to be faithful to what has been entrusted to us, and the Bible calls this "stewardship."

Children's Story: The Buried Treasure

Amanda was a very talented girl. She loved drawing, taking photos, traveling, and doing crossword puzzles. But most of all, she loved collecting stamps. She had a great passion for it, and her collection included more than 250 stamps of different colours and values from all over the world. She would show her collection to her friends and even exchange stamps through the mail with other children who also were collecting stamps.

One thing Amanda didn't like to do, though, was to play her violin every day. She loved music, of course, and she was the one who begged her mum to take her to music school. But when it came to daily practice, she would always delay or skip it! Her mum would remind her every day to practice, but every time something would come up or be more urgent to do. So, Amanda would sometimes forget to play her violin. More than that, when it came to playing in church, she would always complain that she was too shy or that she would prefer doing something else.

One day, after her mum received a text message from the music teacher saying that Amanda needed to practice more, her mum took the box in which Amanda kept her stamp collection and buried it in a little hole she dug in the garden. The next day, when Amanda came home from school, she seemed very happy. She told her mum that she had just received two new stamps from her best friend, whose dad had travelled to a foreign country. But when she wanted to

Questions:

1. Who is the lord of the parable for you?
2. What are the talents received for which you will one day have to give an account?
3. How do the parables of Jesus help me to have a correct understanding of what He expects of me?

add the two new stamps to her collection, the box was missing! Extremely worried, she looked everywhere in her room where she thought it might be, but could not find it. Almost crying, she went to her mum and asked her if she had seen the stamp box.

"Are you sure you have searched everywhere?" her mother asked.

"Yes, Mum, I'm sure I've looked very carefully. Oh, Mum, I can't even think about losing my stamp collection!" she sighed. "That box was like a treasure box for me!"

"Well, then, let's look for it together," her mum suggested. "Because many treasure boxes that are lost have no value, right?" she asked, looking into Amanda's eyes. "Yes," the 12-year-old girl responded. "Do you really think it is lost, Mum?" she asked, with fear in her eyes and a trembling voice.

"Let me tell you something," her mum said, talking her hand and guiding her through the back door and into the garden. "You see, our goods are valuable as long as we use them as needed. But when we lose them, or hide them, or when they are buried, they have no value, no matter how big the treasure is." Before Amanda could ask why her mum had taken her into the garden, her mum continued: "It is the same with our talents. They are treasures that God has given to us to use for His glory. Some of us have more, some have less, but each one

has a treasure box in which God has put one or more special talents. When we stop using these talents, when we don't practice them for God's glory and to bless those around us, we bury them, just like a treasure box that is lost or hidden."

"What does this have to do with my stamp box?" Amanda asked, confused.

"It has much to do with both with your stamp box and with your music talent which are both buried right now," her mum answered, leaning on the trunk of the tree beside which she had buried the box. She then removed the dirt and revealed Amanda's stamp box, carefully wrapped in a plastic bag.

"Oh, Mum!" Amanda jumped happily, picked up her box, and held it tight to her chest. "I almost thought I lost it!"

"Well, you almost did. And I'm afraid you will lose some of the treasures that God has entrusted you with, like your music talent, if you keep burying them under the dust of time, postponement, or forgetting."

"I think I've got the idea," Amanda said, blushing, yet happy to have recovered her stamp box. "I guess I have another treasure to recover," she said, hurrying to her bedroom to get her violin and practice the song she was to play during the children's program the following Sabbath.

Questions:

1. Can you name one or more talents that God has given you?
2. How can you use your talent or talents for God's glory?
3. How can our talents multiply, as we use them more and more?