

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: November 1, 2009  
Beverly ECC, Chicago, IL

**“KINGDOM FAITHFULNESS”**  
**Matthew 25:14-30**

■<sup>1-4</sup> Early in Christ’s ministry people flock to him in droves. They are {Mt 7:28, 29} amazed by his message, {Mt 9:11} intrigued by his friendships with **“tax collectors and sinners,”** and {Mt 8:27} awed by his miracles.

{Mt 4:24} **“News about Jesus [spreads] all over.”**  
Multitudes from all over Palestine and Syria follow him.

■<sup>5</sup> In the face of this popularity, Jesus warns {Mt 7:21-23}

**“Not all those who say...I am their Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father... On the last day many...will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy *in your name* and *in your name* drive out demons and *in your name* perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”**

Many who take for granted that they have a place in God’s kingdom will hear Christ say, **“I never knew you.”**

Q: How can we be assured of our citizenship in God’s kingdom? How can we be confident that the Lord will recognize us as belonging to him?

A: Here is the answer: We have been exploring defining marks of the kingdom of God ~ responsiveness to God, love for God, love for others, humility, and mercy. Kingdom citizens embody its essential qualities, not perfectly but increasingly and with integrity.

Are we demonstrating love, humility, and mercy better now than before? Are those qualities integral to who we are, or are they just “tacked on”?

★ Today, we add another quality to the list: faithfulness. It is as important in God’s kingdom as responsiveness, love, humility, and mercy are.

□ Kingdom faithfulness is also the theme of the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30.

📖 I used to think story is all about stewardship (how we use the money, time, abilities and opportunities God gives us). If so, the fundamental concern here is competence: have you been effective?

- But how does the master praise the servant who had five bags of gold and now presents him with ten? Does he say, “Well done, good and *efficient* servant”? No. Verse 21 ~ **“Well done, good and *faithful* servant! You have been *faithful* with a few things.”**

- How does the master praise the servant who started with two bags but brings back four? Does he say, “Well done, good and *productive* servant”? No. Verse 23 ~ **“Well done, good and *faithful* servant! You have been *faithful* with a few things.”**

Clearly, this story does have significant implications for stewardship. Yet I have come to believe that the deeper focus is on a more basic faithfulness to God and his kingdom.

Q: What is kingdom faithfulness?

- ⊛<sup>1</sup> Kingdom faithfulness is serving the right God.

- ☑ Everyone has a god. Even atheist Stephen Hawking, when asked if he believes in God, said, **“Yes**

– if by ‘God’ you mean the embodiment of the laws of the universe.”

📖 One’s god is the being, object or force in which they invest the highest value, trust, and service. In effect, it is that person’s king or lord.

- Notice the excuse “**the man [with] one bag of gold**” makes in verse 24 ~ “**Master, I knew that you are a hard man.**”

The first two believe their master is generous and so they experience his trust as a great opportunity. But the third is confident his master is “**a hard man,**” an angry and demanding god. Hence, he perceives the trust as a burden. He acts accordingly, and is unfaithful.

☹ Many who profess Christianity do not serve the real God. They try to refashion God to make him more reasonable, more manageable, more agreeable. When I have fallen into this trap, my god has ended up thinking and acting and relating much like me.

- 🕒 Some worship a one-dimensional god. Depending on their point of view this idol is only holiness, so he hates sinners; only mercy, so he could never allow anyone to go to hell; only generosity, so he guarantees their health and wealth; and so on.

- 🕒 Some worship a tribal god. This false god esteems the USA above other nations. Consequently he pours out greater blessing on us than on them, and in war he sides with us against our enemies.

- 🕒 Some worship an elemental god. They will do anything to gain and keep money, pleasure, prestige, power, security, or something else along those lines.

Those who serve false gods are usually sincere. Still, they cannot embody kingdom faithfulness: “**Not all those who say... [Jesus is] Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven.**”

- 🌟<sup>2</sup> Kingdom faithfulness is serving the right God, with perseverance.

- In verse 19 the master returns – not after a few weeks or months; “**After a long time.**”

📖 Perseverance is steadfast, long-continued diligence. It is honoring our commitment over the long haul, in spite of struggle and hardship. This is seldom noticed by others, and it is neither exciting nor fun.

- <sup>6</sup> But without perseverance we will not end well. Hebrews 12:1-3 calls us to follow Christ’s example ~

**Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**

- <sup>7</sup> It is essential that we {Heb 10:36} “**persevere so that when [we] have done the will of God, [we] will receive what he has promised.**”

Not everyone who begins strong finishes well. “**Not all those who say... [Jesus is] Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven.**”

- 🌟<sup>3</sup> Kingdom faithfulness is serving the right God, with perseverance and courage.

- In verses 16 and 17 the men with the five bags and two bags go out **“at once and put [the] money to work.”**

Each gains a 100% return. We do not know how they **“put [it] to work”** (there was no stock exchange or commodities market) but any strategy that doubles your investment entails serious risk. These servants act boldly.

- By way of contrast, in verse 18 **“The man [with] one bag [goes] off, [digs] a hole in the ground and [hides it].”** He explains why in verse 25 ~ **“I was afraid.”**

Does anyone remember what the organizing principle of the kingdom of God is? The organizing principle is love ~ love for God expressed in obedience, and love for others expressed in words and deeds of compassion and service.

In some respects, the master in this parable represents God. The third servant’s fear of him is evidence that he is not living in love.

■<sup>8</sup> First John 4:16-18 declares,

**God is love. Whoever lives in love [not just any love, αγάπε love] lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.** [In other words, being **“like Jesus”** makes love **“complete among us,”** and that will calm our fears **“on the day of judgment.”**] **There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears [that is, who is afraid of God] is not made perfect in love.**

Of course, those of us who live in God’s kingdom do fear him, in the sense of having profound reverence for him and being in deep awe of God’s beauty, holiness, power, and so forth. God is GOD, and we are not!

But we need not fear him the way the third man does – as if the Lord were an abusive father who now and again beats us within an inch of our lives without provocation, or a sadistic judge who is intent on locking us up and throwing away the key if we slip up just once.

If we relate to God that way, we do not love him. **“Not all those who say... [Jesus is] Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven.”**

✪<sup>4</sup> Kingdom faithfulness is serving the right God, with perseverance and courage, with the result that we build up the right kingdom.

Though the language of kingdom might sound out of place to 21<sup>st</sup> century ears, every human being lives in and serves a kingdom: either the kingdom of God, or some version of the kingdom of the world.

Q: The question is not, are we building up a kingdom? It is, *which* kingdom are we building up?

The first two servants in the parable build up the kingdom of their master, the kingdom of God. The third believes he is doing the same thing, but he is deceived.

He {Mt 7:26-27} **“is like a foolish man who built his house on sand,”** who assumed it would keep him safe. But when **“the rain came down, the streams**

**rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”**

So are those who hear the words of Jesus and do not put them into practice. So are those who build up some kingdom other than the kingdom of God. **“Not all those who say... [Jesus is] Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven.”**

Kingdom faithfulness is serving the right God, with perseverance and courage, with the result that we build up the right kingdom. Those who embody this kind of faithfulness will hear Christ Jesus say, **“Well done, good and *faithful* servant! You have been *faithful* with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”**

This is the word of the Lord.