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Title: "Doing Business Until Jesus Comes"

Text: Matthew 25:14-30

True or False – Jesus is coming back. The Word promised He would come the first time and HE CAME! God is not a man that He should lie. God ALWAYS honors His Word. So we KNOW Jesus is coming back. We know the end of the story. We've read the last chapter of the book. Why should we then entangle ourselves in the messy affairs of this world when we are just passing through? Why should we struggle for a more just and moral society? Why don't we just hold hands, sing songs, read scripture, and wait for the inevitable?

In a story in the Book of Luke, Jesus used a phrase that I want to ring in our ears. The King James says, "*Occupy till I come...*" The NKJV says, "*DO BUSINESS TILL I COME.*" This should be the WATCH WORD for every believer who longs for the Lord's coming. Here is how that line fits into this story: "*Therefore He said: 'A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, "Do business till I come"'"*" (Luke 19:12-13). A similar story is told in the book of Matthew. This parable dispels ANY notion of believers remaining idle while they wait for their Master's return. Here, Jesus gives us the key to our responsibilities as we wait for His coming. (Read the text.)

Just prior to telling this story, Jesus told the parable of the ten virgins. Five of those young women were not alert and DID NOT READY THEMSELVES for the bridegroom's return. As a result, THOSE virgins were turned away from the wedding party. The door was CLOSED in their faces. This story expresses to us the importance of WAITING and WATCHING for Jesus' return. But the parable that follows teaches us what to do WHILE we are waiting. The bottom line – WE NEED TO BE WORKING! We're to be involved, energized, doing business for our Lord. The parable warns us against LAZINESS and PASSIVITY. The first parable (ten virgins) emphasizes ATTITUDE. The second (the talents) emphasizes ACTION. Both parables encourage us to WATCH for His appearing and to faithfully LABOR in the work of God while we wait for that day.

- 1. The Uncertain Return (vs. 14).** In those days, long business journeys were common place. There were no airplanes, charter buses, trains, taxis or rental cars. NO bicycles. No roller skates. A business trip to another nation or distant city might mean weeks or months of travel. So what would the householder or business owner do about matters at home while he was gone? Generally he would give the responsibility to his servants. His servants were charged with handling the master's affairs while he pursued business elsewhere. When the lord of the household said, "I'm going to a far county," **he had NO IDEA when he would return – NOR did his servants.** Yet he expected those servants to be ready for his return EVERY DAY. EVERY morning when those servants got up, the master expected them to be ready and available to give an account of their stewardship and their activities. What a powerful reminder that every believer should ALWAYS be looking for Jesus' return, especially because we don't know when it will be! Jesus EXPECTS us to watch for His return. Yet while watching, we are to work on His behalf.
- 2. The Unequal Responsibilities (vs. 15).** People are always asking or thinking – "Why did Joe or Jane have that blessing or opportunity or privilege? Why hasn't God done that for me?" The better question is "Why would God ever do anything for any of us?" Jeremiah wrote, "*Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not*" (Lamentations 3:22). The ONLY thing we "deserve" is His wrath. If we have anything at all, if we are given any position of responsibility whatsoever, it is only because of God's great GRACE. So why in the world should we be measuring ourselves against anybody else's abilities? I like Paul's gentle sarcasm when he wrote: "*We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise*" (2 Corinthians 10:12). In the Matthew story, Jesus says, "*And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one.*" The talents spoken of here are not spiritual gifts or abilities, as the word implies in our culture today. A talent was simply a measure of money – a monetary term. (However, I don't think we would be off the mark to apply the principle here to our gifts and abilities.) So he gave one man five talents, another man two, and a third man just one. PLEASE NOTICE: **THE TALENTS WERE DISPENSED ACCORDING TO THE JUDGMENT OF THE LORD.** Why did the master in that story give differing amounts as he did? Basically he did it because he was who he was. In the same way, God does what He does because He is Who He is. Whenever God gives us an endowment or a responsibility, it is always according to His own judgment, His own

determination. He is sovereign. Romans 12:6 speaks of our having *“differing gifts according to the grace that is given to us.”* 1 Corinthians 4:7 asks, *“Who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?”* If God gave it to you, why are you walking around all puffed up, thinking you somehow produced it for yourself? GOD gives us these gifts. So here the landowner goes away and gives to his servants different endowments. One gets five. One gets two. One gets one. Somebody will say, *“That’s not fair.”* Don’t get caught in that trap. God gives according to His own judgment. His judgments are right. **THE TALENTS WERE DISPENSED ACCORDING TO THE CAPACITY OF THE STEWARD.** The Bible tells us the talents were given *“to each according to his own ability.”* The fact is, God knows who we are and what we can handle. ILLUSTRATION: Back a number of years ago, a business concept surfaced called *“The Peter Principle.”* The original wording by L. Peter, the author, went like this: *“In a hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence.”* In other words, people tend to get promoted BEYOND their capabilities. They start off knowing what they are doing and have a good handle on their tasks. By the time they are through being promoted, however, they’re in way over their heads. God doesn’t do that. He never promotes anybody beyond his or her capacity. The gifting is not only dispensed according to the will of God and according to the capacity of the individual steward, but it is also given to us so that we might be complete. **THE TALENTS WERE DISPENSED IN ORDER TO FULLY EQUIP EACH MAN.** The five-talent person wasn’t any more *“complete”* than the two-talent or the one-talent man. Whatever we have from God – if He gave it to us and He knows it to be perfect and appropriate for us – we are complete in that gifting. The landowner went away and gave his three servants some specific things to administrate. He rode off down the road and disappeared into the distance. What are those servants to do? They must discipline themselves to continue acting and doing business just as if the master were still with them. It’s NOT easy to stay accountable when the boss ISN’T looking over your shoulders, is it? It isn’t easy to keep the routine when you don’t have to get up at such and such a time or punch a time clock. The boss couldn’t check in by phone or fax or email. The servants were simply left to do their work. He has to trust them to act in his best interest. Each employee responded. Two responded one way. One responded in another way.

3. **The Unusual Response (vs. 16-18).** How did each of the men respond to the trust placed in him by his master? **The faithful men doubled their endowments.** *“Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents”* (vs. 16). That’s a 100 percent increase! That’s *“doing business.”* What about the next man? *“And likewise he who had received two gained two more also”* (vs. 17). He also doubled the master’s money. That’s good investment – good stewardship. Which did better? Actually, they both did the same. They took what they had and increased it in the identical proportion. Which had more? The one who had five – but he also had more to start with. He took what he had, improved it, and made it something better than it was. What about the next man? **The unfaithful man hoarded his endowment.** *“But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord’s money”* (vs. 18). This last servant didn’t do anything with his endowment. He is supposed to have been afraid of losing it. So, he went and buried it. Perhaps every day he checked to make sure it was still there. Perhaps he even thought about how proud his master would be that he hadn’t spent one nickel. That man had a WRONG attitude. The faithful men DOUBLED their endowments. The unfaithful man HOARDED his endowment. How would the master respond? They were about to find out.
4. **The Unique Reward (vs. 21).** *“His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’”* **There was a COMMENDATION, a PROMOTION, and an INVITATION.** The two servants who had doubled their master’s money were called before him. He COMMENDED them for doing business while he was away – for taking their initial investments and multiplying them. As a result, each received a significant PROMOTION. *“Well done, good and faithful servant. I have given you a little to manage. Now you are going to have much to manage.”* What a thought – the way you pursue the Lord’s business in this world today determines the kind of administration you will have in the coming kingdom. This is one of the greatest keys to stewardship in the Word of God. We’ve heard it again and again, *“If you give to the Lord, He’ll give back to you. You give with your little shovel, and He gives back with His big shovel. You can’t outgive God.”* I believe that. Yet I think the principal reason people who give to the Lord end up receiving more is because God sees they are capable of managing what He has put into their hands. He takes note of their faithfulness. He enlarges their capacity. Then He enlarges their responsibilities. That’s how it works. So if you want more – in this life or the next – you had better manage what He has already given you as faithfully as you possibly can. The people God trusts with much are those who

have first proved faithful with little.

5. **The Unthinkable Rebuke (vs. 24).** In Matthew 25:24 the unfaithful servant said to his master, *“Lord, I knew you to be a hard man.”* We would say he is a most generous man. This third servant really didn’t know his master. That was his first problem. If you don’t know the Lord, if you don’t know what kind of a Master He is, you will NEVER trust Him. The man goes on to say, *“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.”* In other words, *“I didn’t trust you, lord.”* If you don’t trust your Lord, it’s a simple fact that you will not invest your time and energy and involvement in serving Him. This man FAILED because he did NOT KNOW and, therefore, did NOT TRUST his master. Verses 26-28 says, *“But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. Therefore you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.’”* The result of his failure? He was CONDEMNED. Why was he condemned? He hadn’t wasted his master’s goods, like the unjust steward in Luke 16. Nor had he spent all he had in riotous living, as the young man in Luke 15. He was not ten thousand talents in debt, like the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18. He hadn’t done any of those things. The point was NOT that he had done something WRONG. The point was that HE HADN’T DONE ANYTHING! That’s where many of God’s people find themselves in the kingdom today. It’s not that they’re doing BAD things and undercutting the work of God. It is just that they’re NOT DOING MUCH OF ANYTHING AT ALL! “80 percent of the church members are cheering on 20 percent of the exhausted workers.” “All right! Go for it! Three cheers! Get it done!” If we were to let the truth of this parable grip our hearts, we would ALL be doing what we could until our Lord and Master returns and calls us to account. This is NOT the time to sit on our hands. It’s time to GET BUSY as never before. It’s time to use every gift and ability He has so graciously given us to advance the Kingdom: the gift of helps – the gift of mercy – the gift of teaching – the gift of administration. Listen to the J. B. Phillips paraphrase of Romans 12:6-8: *“Through the grace of God we have different gifts. If our gift is preaching, let us preach to the limit of our vision. If it is servicing others, let us concentrate on our service; if it is teaching, let us give all we have to our teaching; and if our gift be stimulating of the faith of others let us set ourselves to it. Let the man who is called to give, give freely; let the man in authority work with enthusiasm; and let the man who feels sympathy for his fellows in distress help them cheerfully.”* Use your gifts. Make it work. Grow it. Practice it. Let God multiply it. What God has given you as an ability, give it back to Him WITH improvement. Pursue the areas in which God has uniquely equipped you to serve.
6. **Three Places to Start. WE ARE TO BE BUSY EQUIPPING BELIEVERS.** Knowing that Jesus may return at ANY MOMENT changes the way we live. In his first letter, the elderly apostle John penned these words: *“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure”* (1 John 3:2-3). 2 Peter 3:11-12, 14-15 says: *“Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? . . . Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation – as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you.”* Peter is saying that Jesus could come back at any moment. It DOES matter what He finds us doing when He steps through the clouds. Perhaps one of the reasons God will have to wipe tears from our eyes (Rev. 21:4) is because of our grief and shame over how He will find us when He comes. **WE ARE ALSO TO BE EVANGELIZING THE LOST.** In Acts 1, the disciples were gathered around the risen Lord, just before He ascended into heaven before their eyes. What priorities did He leave with them at that final farewell? *“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight”* (Acts 1:6-9). Jesus is saying, “Don’t be asking Me about times and seasons. Get busy and do the work.” Do you have family members who have not yet come to Christ? They should be at the top of your prayer list. **WE ARE TO BE BUSY ENCOURAGING THE CHURCH.** You may possess the spiritual gift of encouragement. Even if you don’t, practice encouraging others anyway. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, *“And let us*

consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Hebrews 3:13 says, “...encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” We are ALL called to encouragement. Do it with words, phone calls, emails, hugs, prayer, flowers, gifts, smiles, heartfelt applause – JUST DO IT! What do we have on our plates as we anticipate His immediate return? Disciple and build up fellow believers. Reach the lost. Encourage one another with all your hearts. That should keep us busy for a while.

- 7. Work While You Wait.** Anticipating the Lord’s return is not just a matter of waiting, it is a matter of working – working hard – working faithfully – working in the power and joy of the Holy Spirit. What would you like to be doing when the Lord comes? Where would you like to be when the trumpet sounds, when the archangel shouts, and when in the twinkling of an eye we are changed and rise into the clouds to meet Him? What has He given you to do? DO THAT! DO BUSINESS UNTIL HE COMES!