

19 November 2023

Sermon by Isaac De Jongh.

May I speak in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost – Mission Sunday.

**Themes for today:** Prayers. Gifts and faithfulness.

**Readings:**

Judges 4: 1-7; Psalm 123; 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11 and Matthew 25: 14-30.

**The First reading.** (Judges 4:1-7)

Judges reading talks about how Israel was delivered from the bondage of their enemies under the direction of a woman named Deborah, who was both a judge and a prophetess. She prophesied that a woman would destroy the enemy's leaders.

The account is of the reign of Deborah as Judge. The Israelites were subject to King Jabin of Canaan who maintained his rule through Sisera as commander of the army. Deborah orders Barak to confront Sisera with assurance of God's support in the endeavour.

The noteworthy point is God's use of a woman to lead the Israelites. Deborah is the only female judge, and she is also a prophet. She hears and speaks for God. The gospel lesson for today is the parable of the talents, in Matthew, where Jesus warns against burying a gift that God has given. Deborah is an example of someone who seems to put her gifts to work in surprising, creative, and inspiring ways.

**The Psalm.** (Psalm 123)

The proud in Psalm 123 are the complacent. They are those who are at ease, who are not suffering as the people of Israel are in the psalm. The arrogant are

those who proudly look down on those who are suffering. The arrogant and proud do not receive God's mercy because they don't think they need God's mercy.

This is a psalm sung as pilgrims came up toward the temple at Jerusalem. It is a plea for the Lord to have mercy on those who were faithful despite the scorn and contempt from others.

**The Second reading.** (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11)

Jesus is the one who has died, Paul says, on our behalf. Because he experienced death, the Thessalonians can be confident that they will experience life. Whether they are awake or whether they are asleep, as members of Christ, their eternal life is already guaranteed.

Paul admonishes the Thessalonians to be faithful while waiting for the Lord's coming. They are to avoid the dangers of laxity in guarding against idle and evil activities. They are to support each other in faith, love, and hope of salvation through Christ.

**The Gospel.** (Matthew 25:14-30)

The parable is given to make the disciples aware of their accountability even when Jesus would no longer be present.

In Matthew 25, Jesus shared the Parable of the Talents to remind His disciples what really matters in life.

Like the master in the parable Jesus has physically left, but He will return one day. We are the servants waiting for our Master to return. How then should we live as we wait? Like sailors on the open ocean we need reliable navigation, so we keep looking up to Jesus for direction. This parable gives us three truths to guide us as faithful stewards.

***1) God expects us to use what He's given to us for His purposes.***

The master in the parable gave each servant a sum of money to be used for his benefit while he was gone. Each one chose how he was going to use the money. Two of the servants made a good profit with their funds, while the third opted to bury his so it couldn't be lost. The master praised the first two servants, but the third servant was told:

***“Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest” (v. 27).***

The master expected some return on his money, even if it was just minimal interest. So too, God expects some gain from what He has given to us. We not only have money, but we have time, abilities, experience, relationships, and all kinds of other blessings that we can and should be using for God's glory. These things aren't simply for our enjoyment and personal benefit. They're our assignment while we are here on earth, to be handed in to our teacher upon His return.

Churches often talk about tithing 10% of our income as being the “biblical” standard. That may or may not be true depending on how you interpret the entirety of Scripture, but surveys show that actual giving by Christians averages well below 10%. Even for those who do give 10%, what about the other 90%? How might we use all that we have for God? That brings us to the second point.

## ***2) God is the owner of all our resources.***

***“The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1).***

This is just one of many verses that remind us that all we have comes from God. In the parable, the master was the one who determined what to give to each servant, and he had every right to demand an accounting for how the funds were used in his absence.

The money he gave them wasn't just their wages to use as they wished. It was his money to be used for his business. We can tend to forget that even though we work hard to earn a salary, it still belongs to God, because everything on this earth is His. It is only by His grace and provision that ***“in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).***

One day Christ will return to settle accounts, and He will know not only how we've used our money, but also our time, our words, and our abilities. If we remember this truth, it will shape our daily decisions and help us to use all that we have more wisely.

### ***3) Faithful stewardship does not depend on how much you've been given.***

The master was the one who decided how much to give each servant, and it was "according to his ability" (v. 15). His expectation for each one was the same—for them to make some kind of profit. It wasn't a contest or a reason for comparison with one another. Each servant was given what they could handle well.

Each Christian has unique gifts, abilities, and circumstances. God expects each of us to use what we have for His kingdom. We don't need to compare, complain, or question what we have or what we think we're lacking. This is true not just of individuals, but of churches as well. We have what we need to live faithfully.

Having a small amount does not excuse us from faithful stewardship of our money, time, and talents.

***"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much" (Luke 16:10).***

Whether we have much or little, we still need to be faithful to use it in ways that will glorify God. We have been greatly blessed in Jesus Christ, and we have the privilege of sharing our blessings with others.

***"For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (v. 29).***

When we turn to God and faithfully follow Him there is a reward for us that is beyond our wildest imaginations! When God examines us, He will reward us graciously for our faithfulness. Likewise, if we reject God and His ways, if we are unfaithful, there is a harsh judgement that awaits us: a judgement in, ***"the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."***

Let us be faithful because the Lord will hold us accountable, and the Lord will judge us.

This is where we must remind ourselves of the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If we are in Jesus, He will pay the penalties of our judgement and we will receive the rewards of His faithfulness. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus already took on our punishment. Paul said in Romans 8:1, ***“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.”***

If you faithfully follow Jesus; He will pay your penalty and you will receive His reward. If you reject Jesus and His ways, there is only judgement that awaits you. Choose wisely.

The Lord gives us gifts, the Lord holds us accountable, and the Lord judges us.

God, in His grace, has blessed us with everything that we need to faithfully follow Him. He’s blessed us with everything we need to change the world. He’s blessed us with everything we need to be the people He’s created us to be.

The Lord blesses us with all that we need to faithfully follow Him until He returns.

The time and resources God has given us are grace-filled gifts. Let us be faithful.

We have no excuses to not be fully living the life that God has called us to live in Jesus, equipped by His Holy Spirit: ***a life of faithfulness, a life of generosity, a life of love, a life of hope, a life of joy, a live of peace and above all a life of holiness.***

**Let us pray:** *O send Thy Spirit, Lord Jesus Christ now unto us,*

*That He may touch our eyes and make us see.*

*Show us Thy truth concealed within Thy word,*

*And in Thy book revealed we see Thee, Lord. Amen.*