

## **“Saints of God’s Blessings”**

**Matthew 24:45-51**

**First in Series on Blessings**

**All Saints**

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**November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020**

### **Prayer of Preparation**

O Lord, from the hour we first believed to the hour at hand may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable unto you, our Savior, Redeemer, and Friend. Amen.

### **Meditation**

When we read the list of names of the saints a moment ago, I realize that I/we have been here now close to thirteen years. In that time, we have established many relationships and friendships, with a great deal of affection. The persons whose names we mentioned are no exception. They came from a wide variety of backgrounds, and they made Grace Church the congregation it is today.

As Paul told Timothy, ‘they ran the race; and they fought the good fight; they kept the faith, and now they have received a crown of righteousness’ (2 Timothy 4:7-8). They were servants of the Most High; they demonstrated faith and love in big and small ways, day in and day out. They were friends, loved-ones, family, disciples. Above all, they were God’s children; they were sinners of God’s own redeeming, which means they were open to receiving God’s grace.

I make this observation because, as pastors, we try to shepherd ‘sheep.’ Sometimes it is challenge, keeping track of where people are, but most of the time it is a blessing, as we share in laughter and conversation, from birth to death.

Over time, shepherds get to know their sheep; sheep get to know the voice of their shepherds. Jesus says as much in John’s Gospel: the sheep know the Shepherd’s voice (John 10:27). They *know* the Voice when they hear it. In other words, there is no faking it. No pretending. The relationship between sheep and shepherd is real, and it grows.

I suppose that is one way to view this day: that when we remember the ‘saints’ of this congregation we remember how beloved and cherished they are not simply to us but to God; they are cherished to God not because they were ‘perfect’ but because they *knew* how dependent they were on God – shortcomings and all. They were awake to the moving of the Spirit, and so, drawn into the orbit of the kingdom, as faithful and wise servants.

### **Wise and Unwise?**

In fact, as we read the passage from Matthew’s Gospel about wise and faithful servants, or as unwise and unfaithful servants as the case might be, we get a picture of how we might understand what Jesus would have us to do in living a kingdom-life, in being open to God.

As I mentioned before the Offering, we are entering into a time when we consider the ways in which we steward our blessings, or take care of what God has given to us. It involves not just our financial resources but our time and talent as well. What blessings does God want you to give?

It might seem counterintuitive, but God is blessing us, even now, even with all the challenges we face. God is blessing us, and entrusting us with gifts to encourage others.

It is why we want to invite and encourage you to write a story of hope. We can gain strength from others when we hear what the Lord is doing in their lives. After all, that is what stewardship is about: it is about taking care of what the Master has given us and then turning around and blessing others.

In Jesus’ parable today, we learn what it means to take care of what the Master has provided, We learn how a faithful and wise servant is one who, when placed in charge of the household, knows how to care for it when the Master leaves (Matthew 24:35-41).

In this parable, the wise and faithful servant works when the master is away (Matthew 24:45-47). That is, he works on sharing with others, making sure the house is in order, getting out the message, being responsible, respecting others, unlike the unwise and unfaithful servant who *pretends* to work and who *parties* when the master is gone (Matthew 24:48-49). After all, with the unwise and unfaithful servant, there is only *pretense*, there is only dishonesty and lying, as he

mistreats other servants and wrecks the household. The unwise and unfaithful servant is only playing the part.<sup>1</sup>

To which Jesus points out the consequences: such unwise and unfaithful people will find themselves outside the realm of God's grace when it is over (Matthew 25:30). There will be crying and teeth grinding (Matthew 24:51).

It reminds me a little of the old saying: when the cat is away, the mice will play! The parents leave for a weekend and come home to a house full of 'who-knows-what'? The teacher leaves and comes back to a classroom that has left the substitute teacher in tears! The boss leaves an associate in charge and returns to find the whole business out-of-whack.

During the summers in college, I worked in a floor mill. One day the boss caught a few of us loafing and made the work even harder. We thought the boss was not looking. As I recall, there was wailing and weeping when he finished with us!

What is the story in Exodus? Moses goes up on the mountain to receive God's commandments, and when he returns he finds the people worshipping a 'golden calf' (Exodus 32:4). What is the other old saying? Character is who-you-are when no one is watching.

### **Jesus' Parable**

Jesus' parable here is not simply about what happens when the master leaves; and it is not simply about good and bad servants, though it is about that too. It is really about Jesus preparing his disciples for the time when *he* leaves. How are they going to act when *he* is away (Matthew 28:16-20)? Will they continue his work? Or will they just pretend to do it?

Jesus has given them the kingdom of God; he has taught it to them and shared it with them: will they take care of it by blessing those around them, or will they squander it by keeping it all to themselves?

Remember that behind this parable is Jesus' saying in the Sermon on the Mount: that a wise builder builds on rock, a foolish one on sand (Matthew 7:24-27).

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<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everybody – Volume 2* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2004), 129.

The wise and faithful steward or servant, according to Jesus, is the one who ultimately respects and honors God, whereas the unfaithful and unwise steward forgets God.<sup>2</sup> The wise and faithful steward is honest and respectable; the unwise and unfaithful steward is dishonest and unteachable.<sup>3</sup>

More importantly, the wise and faithful servant or steward knows what time it is. He or she lives with anticipation of the Master's return. The unwise and unfaithful steward does not know and only lives for himself or herself; the unwise and unfaithful steward does not care about others. How can Jesus make it simpler?

### **Saints, Stewards, and Servants**

When it comes to saints, servants, and stewards – Jesus expects us to live honest and faithful lives. No pretending. No faking. No hypocrisy. Just doing what the Master wants us to do, day in and day out.

Because, as Jesus knows, there will be times when we will fail. We will not always get it right. I don't. You don't. We all don't. Like Peter, who denied Jesus three times, we all fall short.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, like the people on the All Saints list, we all make mistakes.

But like all sinners of God's own redeeming, we can receive what God has ready for us: there is always on offer God's grace. There *is* forgiveness. Not to take advantage of by any means: we are not to use God's grace as an excuse for slacking our responsibilities to God or those who are hurting (cf., Matthew 25:31-45).<sup>5</sup> Rather, we are to remember that to whom *God gives much God expects much* – even when we think no one is watching!<sup>6</sup> We are to remember what Christ has done for us and what we can do for others.

That is what the lives of the saints beckon us to recall – that God has given us blessings to steward, to take care of the Master's household, remembering that the difference between wisdom and folly, faithfulness and disobedience, is whether, in the breaking of bread, we then give that bread to others, and so share in the life of the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 3:23; Matthew 26:69-75.

<sup>5</sup> N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone – Volume 2*, 131.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 12:48.