

HOW THE WISE LIVE **(Matthew 25:14-30)**

From 1984 to 1995 there was a 30-minute TV show that aired weekly. It was hosted by English born, celebrity reporter, Robin Leach, and the show was entitled, *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. Each week, a wealthy entertainer, socialite, athlete, or business mogul was interviewed. The show had exclusive access to this person's usually enormous and elaborately, decorated home. The viewer was provided a behind-the-scenes look at how the 1% live. The curtain was pulled back, and you got to see the opulent residences and glamorous lifestyles of the world's wealthiest people.

Wealth is not new. It has been around a long time. If in the ancient world a book had been written about the lifestyles of the rich and powerful, there are several people from the OT who would have surely been covered. The first might be Abraham. We read in Genesis 13:2, "So Abraham was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold."

Another who might have gotten at least an honorable mention was Moses. While he was born to a Jewish, slave couple, he was reared as the grandchild of the Pharaoh. He lived in the corridors of power and luxury. The first 40 years of his life, he was well-acquainted with the wealth and riches of Egypt.

Chief on the list might just be Solomon, the King of a united Israel. We learn from 1 Kings 3 that early on in his reign, God came to Solomon in a dream. Solomon was granted one wish. He was told to ask for any one thing, and God would grant it to him.

If God came to you with a deal like that, what would you ask for. We would probably blow it. We would likely ask for something that pales in comparison with the true riches that God offers.

Solomon, however, nailed it. He asked for something that pleased God enormously. Recognizing his own youthfulness and lack of experience, Solomon asked God for wisdom so that he could lead his nation well. God gladly granted Solomon's request, and He added, "I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days" (1 Kings 3:13).

During his days, there was no equal to Solomon's wealth. He was unsurpassed in both glory and riches, but the single, most valuable thing Solomon possessed was something riches cannot buy—wisdom.

The thing that makes silver and gold valuable is their rarity. Likewise, the thing that makes wisdom so valuable is that relatively few people possess it. There are plenty of knowledgeable people. There is no shortage of educated people. A truly wise person, however, is difficult to find. With God's guidance, we can become such people.

Jesus, of course, was a wise person. Like Solomon, Jesus often contrasted the wise and the foolish in His teaching. Toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about the wise man who built his house upon a rock and the foolish man who built his house upon the sand (Matthew 7:24-27). He began Matthew 25 by telling us about five wise bridesmaids and five foolish ones.

We come today to another parable in which Jesus introduces us to two servants who showed themselves to be wise and to a third servant who by his actions showed himself

to be terribly foolish. His master called him more than foolish for he referred to him as wicked, slothful, and worthless. Let's read Matthew 25:14-30.

We are not going to look at something as unimportant as the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Our consideration today will be given to "How the Wise Live." If we are to be wise, we must pattern our lives after those who are wise.

I. THE WISE LIVE AS MANAGERS NOT OWNERS.

In the story Jesus told us, we have a master and three servants. The master goes on a long journey, but before he leaves, he gives to each servant a certain amount of money. They don't own this money, but they are to manage it for the benefit of their master. When the master returns, each servant must give an accounting for how they used what they were entrusted with.

The master in the story represents Jesus. We are the servants. Our master has placed certain things in our hands. One day Jesus will return, and we will have to answer to Him for what we have done with what He entrusted to us.

You and I need to live with the realization that we own nothing. Everything we have is on loan to us from God, and He expects us to steward or manage all that He has given us.

Even if your house is fully paid for, you are not a home owner; you are a home manager. Regardless of whether you are still making payments on your vehicle or not, if you have the keys to a car, a truck, an SUV, a van, or anything else, you are the manager of that motorized mode of transportation.

If there is any word that we need to excise or cut out of our vocabulary, it would be the word *my*. We talk about my spouse, my kids, my family, my job, my stuff, my money, my church, my neighborhood, my school, my country. My o' my, we need to get rid of that word *my*.

Let me help you with that. Last night, you went to sleep in God's bed. This morning, you woke up in God's house. You sat down at God's table and ate God's food that you prepared in God's kitchen. You probably had some of God's coffee or God's orange juice that you keep in God's refrigerator. All day long you have been breathing God's air. You came to God's place of worship to hear God's word preached by God's man in the presence of God's people.

Under the inspiration of God's Spirit, King David wrote: "The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1).

I like the way the NLT puts it: "The earth is the LORD's, and everything within it. The world and all its people belong to Him."

In other words: "God own it all. He even owns what you mistakenly think belongs to you."

That means we must not misuse or abuse what belongs to Him because one day you and I will have to answer for what we did or failed to do with what He put out our disposal.

Think like a manager not the owner. Act like the manger not an owner.

We must not complain about how much or how little God has entrusted to us. Not all three servants were given the same amount. One was given 5 talents, another 2, and the third 1.

By the way, the word *talent* may not mean what you think it means. In this passage, talent does not refer to natural or learned abilities. A talent was a weight. It was roughly equal to 75 pounds. It could be a talent of gold or silver or copper or any precious metal. It was used most often of silver.

As of Friday, the price of silver was \$27 and ounce. At \$27 an ounce, a talent or 75 lbs. of silver would be worth approximately \$32,400. In today's money, that is how much the third servant received. The second servant would have received \$64,800, and the first servant was given \$162,000. All three servants were meant to put to use what they were given so as to get a return on the master's investment.

Why were they given different amounts? Wasn't that unfair? They were given different amounts for the same reason that an employer will base an employee's salary on education and experience. A person with only a HS diploma and no experience will not make the same as a person with three degrees in the field and 30 years of experience.

In addition to education and experience, there is something we could call *innate ability*. The first servant had shown himself to be responsible and more than competent. He was good, and so his master was comfortable in giving him greater responsibility.

If you want God to entrust you with more, then you must show yourself to be highly responsible with what you already have. What are you doing with what God has presently given to you? How well are you doing at money management and time management? How skilled are you at seeing and seizing opportunities to serve, and opportunities to witness, and opportunities to worship, and opportunities to express His love to others?

Consider the example of the first servant. Look at v. 16. This man didn't waste any time. He went at once and began using what he had been given. He didn't let any grass grow underneath his sandals. He had a sense of urgency about him. He didn't know how long his master was going to be gone; so, he determined to do as much as he could with the money and time at his disposal.

We shouldn't do any less. We do not all have the same opportunities and responsibilities, but there is one thing we all have in equal amounts. Every single one of us has 86,400 seconds every day, no more, no less.

Benjamin Franklin once wrote: "Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time for that is the stuff life is made of." Don't squander your time. Don't waste your life.

As a manager, there is another thing you will have to do with the resources God has placed at your disposal. You will have to risk them. To make money you have to risk money. Usually, the greater the risk, the greater the reward and the greater the loss if things do not go as hoped.

The first two servants risked the money they had been given, and things worked to their advantage, and they both made a 100% profit. The third man took no risk. He just buried the money. He didn't lose it, but he didn't use it either. And because he didn't use it, eventually, it was taken from him. He lost the money. He lost his position. He lost any respect and favor he had in the eyes of his master.

What would have happened if he had put the money to work and the economy went south and he lost most or even all of what he had been given? Would his master still have been as enraged as he was?

I can tell you how that master would have reacted because he is just a made-up character in a story Jesus told, but I know how our Master would react. I know that our Master loves us, forgives us, and will not give up on us. I think our Master would put His arm around us and say, “You win some, you lose some, but I’m glad you played the game. Next time it is bound to work out better.”

What are you willing to risk to serve the Lord? Are you willing to risk your reputation? Are you willing to look silly or foolish in the eyes of others? Are you willing to risk failure in your efforts to serve the Lord?

One of my favorite movies is *Chariots of Fire* which won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1981. It tells the true story of Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams who both represented Great Britain in the 1924 Olympics in Paris. Both men were runners. Liddell was a devout Protestant and Abrahams was Jewish. Early in the movie, Abrahams lost a local race. Feeling dejected, he said to his girlfriend: “If I can’t win, I won’t race.”

Wisely, she replied, “If you don’t race, you can’t win.”

If you won’t serve God because of fear, you can’t win.

II. THE WISE LIVE EXPECTING THE JOY OF GOD.

The first and second servants both received the same commendation. Look at vv. 20-21 and 22-23. Interestingly, one of the rewards of faithful service is greater responsibility. Instead, of saying, “Good job. Take a vacation,” the master says, “Good job. Let me give you more work.” The greatest reward, however, are the words, “Enter into the joy of your master.”

A child wants to please his parents. A student wants to please his teacher. An employee wants to please his boss. A worshipper wants to please his god.

Two wonderful things about our God are that, one, He is profoundly happy, and two, He wants us to enter into His joy. God is not up in heaven looking for reasons to be upset. God is a joyous God. He looks for reasons to celebrate.

We read in 2 Chronicles 16:9, “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward Him.” God is looking for people to bless; He is not looking for people to judge. That will come in time, but right now, He wants to bless people. God wants you to have His joy.

On the night Jesus was arrested, He said to His disciples, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

My first year in seminary, I took a course in worship. The professor required us to buy a book that had only been out a year or so. I had never heard of it before, but it went on to be a best-seller and one of the most formative books I have ever read. The title of the book is *Desiring God*. It was written by John Piper, a long-time Baptist pastor in Minneapolis, MN. On the last page of the first chapter, he wrote: “God’s pursuit of praise from us and our pursuit of pleasure in Him are the same pursuit.”

Some time later, I read these words from John Piper that communicates that same truth but in a different way. He wrote, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”

All people look for joy, and most people look for joy in all the wrong places. They look for joy in what their money can buy. They look for joy in the creature comforts they can surround themselves with. They look for joy in pleasurable experiences. They look for joy in accomplishments and the applause of others.

We know that we are to look for joy in God’s joy. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. Look to God as the source of your joy, and you will discover the truth of Nehemiah 8:10, “For the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

Her name is Linda Clare. In an article she wrote for *Today’s Christian Woman*, she said:

My long hours working as a childcare provider often tempted me to complain about my job. Although I didn’t know what work God wanted me to do, I was sure it must be something other than “just” babysitting. Then one day, a father who came to pick up his toddler commented, “You taught Kasey to pray. She says grace at home now, and my wife and I are thinking of attending church.” God’s direction suddenly became clear. Now, when others ask what I do for a living, I smile and say, “I ‘just’ babysit for the Lord.”

Whatever you “just” do, just do it for the Lord, and do it expecting to experience His joy.

Our text tells us a third way the wise live.

III. THE WISE LIVE KNOWING WHO GOD REALLY IS.

The problem with the third servant is that he had a defective view of his master. Look at v. 24. This servant insults his master to his face. He calls him a “hard” man. It means “harsh” or “difficult.” Have you ever had a harsh, difficult boss who was demanding, inconsiderate, and whose expectations were just over the top?

Basically, the servant was blaming his boss for his own unwillingness to steward responsibly what had been entrusted to him.

Don’t try that with God. Don’t blame Him for your disobedience. While few would ever say any such thing, many privately believe that. They believe that God is harsh, that He is difficult to please. They think He is going to act unreasonably with them. They have a defective view of God.

I have a friend who grew up with an alcoholic father. His father was mean and showed him no love or affection. He said the nicest thing his father ever said to him was after a school play my friend was in. His father didn’t usually go to such things, but after the play, he looked at his son and said, “That wasn’t so bad.” That was the nicest thing he ever heard his father say to him.

Our view of God is often informed by our experience with our parents, particularly our dad. I don’t know what your father was like, but your heavenly Father is so superior

to your earthly father that there really is no comparison. Don't let a bad experience color your view of God.

The wise have learned that God can be trusted, that God desires their best, that God is for them, not against them. Let this book teach you and show you who God really is.

IV. THE WISE LIVE WITHOUT FEAR OF GOD'S JUDGMENT.

The master in our story had harsh things to say to his disobedient and disappointing servant. The foolish have every reason to fear God's just judgment. If you, however, have the Spirit of God living within you, you have the mind of Christ. As it says in 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

Also, it says in 1 Corinthians 1:30, "And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

Moreover, we read in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

In his book entitled, *Grace: More Than We Deserve, Greater Than We Imagine*, author Max Lucado tells the odd story of a Chinese man named Li Fuyan. Fuyan suffered from throbbing headaches. Nothing he tried helped. Finally, an X-ray revealed the cause of his unrelenting pain. A four-inch knife blade was lodged in his skull. Four years previous to that discovery, Fuyan had been attacked by a robber. He suffered lacerations on the right side of his jaw. He was aware of that. What he did not know was that the blade of the knife with which he had been attacked had broken off inside of his head. He literally suffered from stabbing pain.

Lucado went on to write:

We can't live with foreign objects buried in our bodies. Or our souls. What would an X-ray of your interior reveal? Regrets over an [earlier] relationship? Remorse over a poor choice? Shame about the marriage that didn't work, the habit you couldn't quit, the temptation you didn't resist, or the courage you couldn't find? Guilt lies hidden beneath the surface, festering, irritating. Sometimes so deeply embedded you don't know the cause.

If that is your reality, come to Christ. Miraculously, He will remove the cause of your pain and give you His peace, and His joy, and His righteousness. That is how the wise live. Come to Jesus, and be counted among their number.