

THE PROGRAM: WARM UP
Matthew 25:14-30

INTRODUCTION:

Did you know that NASA (the National Aeronautic and Space Administration) has been issued over 6,300 patents? That is nearly one in a thousand of all patents ever issued by the U.S. Patent Office since 1790.

- The world of personal computers would not exist had it not been for NASA development. In fact, we wouldn't have electronic calculators. Cell phones use satellites to relay their signals...as do landlines when making most long distance telephone calls. And, of course, satellite television that has brought us hundreds of channels with nothing worth watching.
- We wouldn't have such medical advances as MRIs, CT Scans, and ear thermometers had it not been for this country's space program.
- Cordless tools were first developed for use in space.
- Improved shock-absorbing helmets, improved thermal underwear and improved ski boots can be credited to NASA's account.
- And, of course, Tang! Who can forget Tang? One popular myth is that Tang was developed for the space program. It was not. Tang was introduced in 1959 but it did not "take off" until 1965 when it was on board Gemini 4 for the astronauts to drink. Suddenly, sales skyrocketed.

Not only has NASA given us new products, it has given us new words. The term "burnout" comes from the vocabulary of NASA. It refers to booster rockets that flare brightly, burn briefly and then, spent of their fuel, separate from the main space vehicle and drop back to earth as empty shells that most often are destroyed on re-entry.

That image has been adopted and applied to people who do not pace themselves and, as a result, deplete themselves to the point that they can no longer function effectively.

One of the ways to prevent burnout is to warm up effectively. For years, athletes have known the importance of warm-up exercises.

- If you go to a basketball game, you'll see the players shooting lay-ups, free throws and jump shots. That's not just practice: they've already practiced. That's warm-ups.
- Before a baseball game, the players run through fielding drills and take batting practice as a way of warming up for the game ahead. Pitchers in the bullpen always warm up before they come in to the game.
- NASCAR racers drive warm up laps

In every sport, competitors warm up before they compete because they want to do their best and they don't want to injure themselves.

In an article about how to warm up before vigorous exercise, author Elizabeth Quinn, an exercise physiologist and fitness consultant who has been writing about sports medicine, injuries and training techniques and working with athletes for over a decade, notes:

"Most athletes perform some type of regular warm-up and cool down during training and racing. A proper warm up can increase the blood flow to the working muscle which results in decreased muscle stiffness, less risk of injury and improved performance. Additional benefits of warming up include physiological and psychological preparation."

I want to suggest to you this morning that what is true of physical training is also true of spiritual training. None of us should expect to jump into a significant responsibility of ministry without first warming up. In ministry, we warm up by demonstrating reliability and competence in small areas of service and then, when we do, God will give us even more responsibility. The Biblical pattern is that faithfulness in small opportunities will lead to greater opportunities. Jesus told a story about that. It is recorded in Matthew 25:14-30. I have chosen to read this parable from The Cotton Patch Version of Matthew's gospel.

"It [The God Movement] is like a businessman who was leaving town for a long time and called in his assistants and turned over his investments to them. He made one responsible for about five hundred thousand dollars, another two hundred thousand, and another a hundred thousand—according to each one's ability—and then he left town. Right away the man with the five hundred grand got to work and made five hundred more. The man with the two hundred grand did the same and made another two hundred. But the guy with the hundred G's went and rented a safe-deposit box and put his boss' money in it. After a long time the boss returned and called his assistants together for an accounting. The one with the five hundred thousand brought his other five hundred thousand and said, 'Sir, you let me have five hundred grand; look, I've made another five hundred.' The boss said, 'Splendid, you good and responsible worker! You were diligent with the smaller sum; I'll entrust you with a larger one. You'll be a partner in my business.' Then the one with the two hundred G's came and said, 'Sir, you let me have two hundred thousand; look, I've made another two hundred.' The boss said, 'Splendid, you good and responsible worker! You were diligent with the smaller sum, I'll entrust you with a larger one. You'll be a partner in my business.' Well, the hundred grand man came up and said, 'Sir, I know you are a hard-nosed man, squeezing pennies you haven't yet made and expecting a profit before the ink has dried. I was plain scared to take any chances, so I rented a safe-deposit box and put your money in it. Look, you've got every cent.' But his boss replied, 'You sorry, ornery bum! You knew that I squeeze pennies I haven't yet made, and expect profits before the ink dries. Then you should have turned my money over to the bank so that upon my

return I would get back at least my principal with interest. So then, y'all take the money away from him and give it to the one with the million. For it will be given to everyone who has the stuff, and he'll have plenty, but the man who doesn't have the stuff will have even what he has taken away from him. Now as for this useless critter, throw him in the back alley. That'll give him something to moan and groan about.'

That homey rendering of the text does a good job of making it understandable, don't you think? But no matter what translation of the Bible you choose to use, there are some important points that leap off the page.

I. ALL SERVANTS ARE GIVEN OPPORTUNITIES

A king, a master, a boss or a businessman: whatever you call him, the guy in power has called his servants to him so he could entrust his enterprise to them while he was away. Most translations say he called his servants (the Cotton Patch Version says he called his assistants) but the point I want you to notice is that he called all of them. It doesn't say he called some of his servants or some of his assistants or some of his hands. He called them...he called all of them.

Now one thing you need to know: this is one of a small group of parables that was written about us. This is one of a handful of stories that Jesus told to his disciples but it is about us: you and me, living right here in Clay County Illinois. This parable is about us.

It is about us because it is about those who are responsible for the Master's work until the Master returns. And that is us. Jesus Christ is our Master and he has delegated to us the responsibility of managing his work until he returns.

And in the wisdom of Jesus, he has given each of his servants responsibility for the success of his work. There are no honorary titles, no advisory functions and no figurehead offices. Every servant is expected to serve so every servant has been given a job to do. Every assistant is supposed to assist so each has been given tasks to fulfill. Every worker is expected to work so they have all been given work assignments.

What job or jobs are you doing in the church? What ministries are you performing? And, by the way, sitting and listening to sermons does not count as ministry any more than eating at the boss's table is to be considered constructive work.

In Jesus' story, all the servants are given jobs to do and opportunities to serve. That's the way he told the story because that's the way it is in his work.

II. NOT ALL OPPORTUNITIES ARE THE SAME

Now, while all servants are given opportunities, not all opportunities are the same. The older King James translation of the Bible used the word “talents” to convey the meaning of what was given to the servants. But that misled some people into thinking about abilities. For years, folk said, “I can’t sing. I can’t play the piano or the organ. I can’t give speeches or sermons. I don’t have any talents so this parable doesn’t apply to me.”

It is unfortunate that the word “talent” was misconstrued in that way. To try to clarify, the New International translation calls them “talents of money” and that is a bit better because the word “talent” did refer to a unit of currency. In Greek, there is a word “*talanton*” that means a balance, a weight or a sum. A talent of silver or a talent of gold was a unit of value based on the weight of the precious metal. That’s one reason I wanted to read from the Cotton Patch gospel this morning. I thought it conveyed the thought very well when it referred to \$500,000, \$200,000 and \$100,000. Now those are designations we can understand.

Obviously, the master did not give each servant the same amount to work with. And that is part of the point of the parable. All servants are given opportunities but not all are given the same opportunities. The story is like that because reality is like that.

I know that the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence says, “*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights...*” And it may be heresy, right here in the Land of Lincoln, to suggest that the Great Emancipator was incorrect but I really do think he was wrong. All men are not created equal. Not all inequality is due to society or prejudice or cultural bias. We are not all created equal.

- Some people came into the world with birth defects and while their lives are of equal value, their opportunities are not.
- Some people were born into families of privilege and some were born into poverty.
- Some people came out of the womb with greater intellectual aptitude than others.
- Some started life in countries and cultures where women were regarded as no more than livestock.

All are not created equal. That’s life. And in the Kingdom of God, all servants have opportunities to serve but not all servants have the same opportunities.

III. ALL SERVANTS WILL BE REWARDED

Another aspect of this parable that we dare not miss is that all of the

King's servants will be rewarded. That has to be one of the most stark and inescapable facts in the story line: the King is going to return and when he does, there will be an accounting and all of his servants will be rewarded.

Which really brings me to the next point I want you to grasp.

IV. NOT ALL REWARDS ARE THE SAME

All the King's servants will be rewarded but not all the rewards will be the same. Those whom the King declared to be good servants and faithful servants received a positive reward: they were blessed with being given more opportunities by being put in charge of a greater share of the Kingdom in addition to being invited to share in their Master's joy.

But the one who did nothing with the opportunities with which he was entrusted, will be branded as wicked, lazy and worthless; he will lose what he used to have; he will not be invited to share the joy that brings his Master happiness and he will be banished to a place of darkness, weeping and pain.

I don't know about you but I do not want to face that fate when the King returns! And he is returning.

CONCLUSION:

1968 was the year that the Olympic Games were hosted by Mexico. There was a drama that was played out in those Games that languished as an obscure footnote to sports history for 40 years.

But in January of 2008, the Chinese musician, You Hongming, resurrected the story and brought it to the world. You Homgming wrote and produced a music video titled "The Hero" based on the Olympic experience of the Tanzanian marathon runner, John Stephen Akhwari.

Akhwari competed in the 1968 Games in Mexico but because he was not used to the climate and altitude of Mexico City, he fell at the start of the Marathon and was badly injured. The other runners passed him one after another, and his chance of winning a medal became extremely slim. However he didn't quit and insisted on finishing the race.

When Akhwari limped into the stadium on bloody and bandaged legs an hour after the winner of the race had left, there were only a few spectators remaining in the stands. They were shocked to see Akhwari wincing with pain at every step toward the finish line.

When asked why he didn't retire from the race, Akhwari's answer was calm and simple: "My country didn't send me here to start the race. They sent me here to finish it."

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Few were in the stadium to see Akhwari finish the race...but his family was there. His father was there. And they were filled with pride for John Stephen Akhwari.

One day my race will be over. And when it is, my Father will be waiting for me. I want to be able to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." And I want Him to say to me, "Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your reward. Come and share your Master's happiness."

INVITATION: #675 – *"I Gave My Life For Thee"*