

Mysteries of the Kingdom - Matthew 25:14-30

The Talents

During my formal education, I was fortunate to be exposed to four languages. In high school I had two full years of Spanish, and in college I took two full years of French. My seminary saw me taking three semesters of Greek and two of Hebrew. Since high school, I have not used Spanish at all. As a result, it is gone! Since college, I have not even looked at French, and again, it is gone! Since seminary, I have seldom looked at Hebrew. I still know a few facts but it is mostly gone! I have kept up slightly with Greek, but only in the most meager of ways. I still have enough knowledge to be functional for preaching efforts, but don't ask me to go to Athens and try to communicate!

That is the reality of a foreign language. Anyone taking one knows; you must use it OR you will lose it. That is also the reality expressed in the parable we consider here. It is the final kingdom parable that Jesus told. Even though the words, "*kingdom of heaven*" are not in the text, if we return to verse one of the chapter for the context, it is clear that this is a parable of the kingdom.

There are many aspects of kingdom living. Matthew's gospel is full of them. Two are specifically given here in chapter 25: preparation for the kingdom (vv. 1-13 in the Parable of the Virgins) and stewardship in kingdom living (given in this parable of the Talents). The placement of these two parables one after the other is not coincidental in Jesus' teaching. I think it is because He intended to warn us that while we watch and wait we must also work! Now is not the time to sit around – it is the time to use what God has given us in His service; otherwise, we may well lose it! Notice then what we learn from this parable of the kingdom.

First of all we see the **fruit conveyed**. One of the first things to notice is that everybody gets something! What are they getting? What is a talent? One commentator said: "the term talent first represented a measurement of weight and then came to designate a certain amount of silver or gold. Money values vary from day to day and can't be compared across the centuries. \$1000 may suggest the equivalent of a talent, but only as a very rough estimate." Most commentators try to put some value on it, however, and it is usually much greater than \$1000! In fact, Warren Wiersbe suggests that a talent is the equivalent of twenty years wages!

We may not be able to determine the actual worth of a talent but its importance is obvious. In fact, the use of the word for personal capabilities or "gifts" arose from this parable. Obviously this parable speaks of financial stewardship, but it also has deeper, eternal meaning as well. Theologian Millard Erickson says that because of the setting (eschatological) it may well be an indication that the reward for faithful work here on earth will be work in heaven. This is certainly seen in the first two servants. They were put in charge of MORE things. They were faithful with what they had been given before the master left, and they were rewarded when the master returned to take them into his joy. The first servant, however, had what he had been given taken from him at settlement time.

The point of all of this is that they ALL had been given something. They ALL had the opportunity. I believe it is possible to see these talents as a measure of faith. Granted, some had more than others (5 vs. 2 or 1). But don't we who live in America have more chance to hear gospel than many? Just because somebody has more or less opportunities does not relieve

responsibility. The slave with one talent could have just as easily doubled his to two. In fact, there are many with few opportunities to hear who DO respond. In like manner the slave with five could have hidden all five. As well, there are many with multiple chances to hear who bury it every time. So I believe one of the great lessons here is that ALL people have a chance to respond.

Each man had fruit conveyed, but there were two drastically different results. We see that two slaves show evidence of being wheat and, as a result, they are commended. The third slave, however, shows himself to be a tare and, as a result, he is condemned. So let us consider each.

Notice first the **fruitfulness commended**. The first two slaves each made a return on the money the master had entrusted to them. I once knew a church that was full of wonderful folks, but many of them had strange ideas about church finances. One of those ideas included the thought that it was wrong to use the Lord's money to make money. I remember one business meeting when somebody suggested opening a savings account. Several stood to speak and said that to do so would be sinful. I often wondered what they did in their own minds with this parable!

The basic truth here is that we are to use what God endows us with. G.R. Beasley-Murray says, "to receive the gift is to accept a trust that demands a discharge in the service of God." Notice that each of these two servants received the same commendation in vv. 21 and 23: ". . . you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." The master was not concerned with the *portion* of what they brought but the *proportion*. If God has given you two talents, He is not looking for you to accomplish that which it would take five talents to accomplish! But neither does He expect you to sit back and do one talent work, or worse yet, nothing! We must take what we have been given, and faithfully use it in His service. We take our time and give it in teaching, preaching, witnessing, serving, and ministering. We take our treasures and give them in faithful stewardship and sacrifice. We take our lives and pour them out before Him who poured Himself out for us. Only then will we hear those words, we so long to hear - "well done, thou good and faithful servant"

In Matthew 13, Jesus told the parable of the sower. That parable speaks about the condition of people's heart. Some have hard hearts, while others have thorny hearts or rocky hearts. A few have hearts of good soil, however, and bring forth fruit, some 30, 60, or 100 fold. Here in the parable of the talents, these first two servants each have a 100 fold return to offer the Master.

When I took up gardening the church I was part of had lots of farmers, but there were two in particular that I always went to for advice. Both always had beautiful gardens. They would put out a little and get a lot. I do not know if it was 100 fold, but it was certainly a lot. One, along with his wife, worked with children. They had been doing so for years. Adults who were then teaching in the church often hearkened back to the days this couple taught them as children remembering the impact. Yes, their garden was fruitful, but more importantly, they were spiritually fruitful. The other gardener, however, had a different story. In the eight years I knew him, he never did a thing in church (except maybe complain). In fact, I do not think he had ever served in any way. He may have had a fruitful garden, but he was spiritually fruitless. Which leads us to the next thing we see.

But notice next the **fruitlessness condemned**. This is the account of the third slave in vv. 24-30. What a compromising statement in v. 25 - "you have what is yours." Many will

stand before God one day and say: “I haven’t drank!” “I haven’t cursed!” “I haven’t stolen!” Really this is nothing less than “here God, you have what is yours.”

You see, it is not an issue of what you HAVEN’T done. This slave had not misspent the talent. He did not misemploy it. Neither did he misappropriate it. The issue is what HAVE you done with what God has given you. This slave did nothing - he HID the talent!

What are you doing with the blessings of God? Specifically, with His financial blessings. Are you sharing them and using them in His service? Or are you hoarding them for a rainy day? It has been said that money is like manure - good for nothing in a heap, but useful if spread! Many will say, well I haven’t frittered my money away. I didn’t waste it on fancy clothes, expensive sports cars exotic gifts, or immoral practice. This third slave could have well said that - and he STILL stood condemned! Instead, say how AM I using my money for the Lord. Am I tithing? Do I share with those in need? Am I responsible? Do I provide for own?

This third slave simply did NOT employ what he had been given, and the result was devastating: “. . . cast the worthless slave into the outer darkness . . .” (v. 30). Because of the difficulty in interpreting this parable, many have sought to re-interpret these phrases, considering them a type of suburb of heaven. But there is no need to do so for as we have seen, this person is not even a true believer. Instead, they are like one of the tares described in Matt. 13, or one of the foolish virgins in the preceding parable, or one of the goats in the following parable. It is best to understand “outer darkness” and “a place . . . weeping and gnashing of teeth” as nothing less than hell!

An issue of Larry Burkett’s Christian Financial Concepts newsletter told of First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. They were led by God to practically apply this parable. In June of 1996, they gave \$10 to every church member 10th grade and up; \$5 to 7th - 9th graders; and \$1 to 6th graders and down! It took \$15,000 TOTAL to give out all the money! The pastor told them they had until October 6 to do with that money as God led them. “It’s not my money, it’s not the church’s money. Literally today, God has given you a talent,” he told them.

There were amazing stories of what the people did. One, a first grader, set up a lemonade stand on a golf course. Her \$1 became \$126. But perhaps the greatest testimony wasn’t the money, but the focus. Included with the effort were “grace bracelets.” Church members met numerous people in seeking to invest their funds, and they used these bracelets as a witnessing tool. A good number committed their lives to Christ through this effort!

Whether it is money, ability, position, or whatever, we are to use what God has given us for Him! We are not just investing for the short term – we are investing for eternity. We are to be fruitful for the Master!

First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow. Just a gimmick? In June, they passed out \$15,000. On October 6th, they took up their offering of talents, collecting over \$400,000, plus a number of souls. Well done, good and faithful congregation!