

Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Theme: The parable of the talents

Sermon delivered by Rev Nathaniel Yisa during Evening Worship Service on 08/12/2013 at 5.00pm

(14-15): Jesus describes a master who gives instructions to his servants before departing on a long journey.

This was not a strange idea in the ancient world, where **servants** (slaves) were often given great responsibility. This was often the safest and smartest thing a man could do with his money. "This parable takes up the question which that of the bridesmaids left unanswered: what *is* 'readiness'?" (France)

To one he gave five talents of money, to another two, and to another one: A **talent** was not an *ability* (though this parable has application to our abilities), but a unit of *money*, worth at least \$1,200 in modern terms, and likely much more. "The *talent* was not a *coin*, it was a *weight*; and therefore, its value obviously depended on whether the coinage involved was copper, gold, or silver." (Barclay)

"The English use of 'talent' for a natural (or supernatural) aptitude derives from this parable... But of course the Greek *talanton* is simply a sum of money... it was generally regarded as equal to 6,000 denarii." (France) "If a talent were worth six thousand denarii, then it would take a day labourer twenty years to earn so much." (Carson)

In the application of this parable it is appropriate to see these **talents** as resources in our lives - such as time, money, abilities, and authority.

The servants were given different amounts of money according to their **ability**. One servant only received one talent, yet we should see that this was not an insignificant amount. Some received more; but everyone received something and everyone received a *large amount*.

(16-18) The servants manage the master's money

Each of those who had received **talents** from their master did with them as they saw fit. Two of them **traded with** their talents and earned more talents (**made another five talents ... gained two more also**).

"The point is that the good servants felt the responsibility of their assignment and went to work without delay." (Carson)

We aren't told how they **traded with** their talents. Perhaps they loaned the money at interest, perhaps they used the money and bought things and sold them for more money. The point is that they used what they had and gained more by using.

We can say many good things about the work of the first two servants:

- They did their work *promptly*.
- They did their work with *perseverance*.
- They did their work with *success*.
- They were *ready* to give an account to their master.

He who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money: He did almost *nothing* with his master's money. He did take some care that it would not be lost (by hiding it). But he did nothing *positive* with his master's money, in contrast to the first two servants.

(19-23) The first two servants are judged

After a long time the lord of those servants came: The long delay would tempt the servants to think that they would *never* give an account for their management. Yet they most certainly would.

- **You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things:** The reward was the same for both servants, even though one was given **five talents** and the other was given **two talents**. Each performed the same according to the resources they had received.
- **Well done, good and faithful servant:** This shows that the master looked for goodness and faithfulness in His servants. Whatever financial success these servants enjoyed came because they were **good and faithful**. The master looked first for these character qualities, not for a specific amount of money.

“It is not ‘Well done, good and brilliant servant;’ for perhaps the man never shone at all in the eyes of those who appreciate glare and glitter. It is not, ‘Well done, great and distinguished servant;’ for it is possible that he was never known beyond his native village.” (Spurgeon)

“It is better to be faithful in the infant-school than to be unfaithful in a noble class of young men. Better to be faithful in a hamlet over two or three score of people, than to be unfaithful in a great-city parish, with thousands perishing in consequence. Better to be faithful in a cottage meeting, speaking of Christ crucified to half-a hundred villagers, than to be unfaithful in a great building where thousands congregate.” (Spurgeon)

Come and share your master's happiness: This has the echo of heaven in it. The idea is that there is a place of **joy, happiness**, belonging to the master of these servants, and they are invited to join the master in that place. There is a sense of heaven about this destiny for the two faithful servants.

We can say of the reward for the first two servants:

- They received praise from their master.
- They received a promise of future blessing.
- They received glory, “**the joy of your lord.**”

(24-30) The third servant gives account

Then he who had received the one talent came: The master judged each of the servants individually. If they were taken as a group, they did very well: 8 talents given, and 15 talents returned. Yet each one was judged on their individual faithfulness and effort.

“Remember, my hearer, that in the day of judgment thy account must be personal; God will not ask you what your church did – he will ask you what you did yourself.” (Spurgeon)

The servant who merely buried his talent tried to excuse himself because of his master's great power. In fact, he believed his master to be in some sense omnipotent: harvesting **where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.**

A hard man: “Grasping, ungenerous, taking all to himself, offering no inducements to his servants.” (Bruce)

F.B. Meyer expressed the thinking of this servant: “I can do very little; it will not make much difference if I do nothing: I shall not be missed; my tiny push is not needed to turn the scale.”

“It is the genius of wicked men to lay the blame of their miscarriages upon others, oftentimes upon God himself.” (Poole)

The third servant seemed proud of himself. He seemed to have no idea how much he had displeased his master.

We can say in the third servant’s favour that at least he still understood that what he had been given belonged to his master. He said, “**you have what is yours.**” Many modern servants of God think that when God gives them something, it no longer belongs to God; it belongs to *them* and they can do with it as they please.

“We ought to observe that he did not spend that talent upon himself, or use it in business for his own benefit. He was not a thief, nor in any way a misappropriator of moneys placed under his charge. In this he excels many who profess to be the servants of God, and yet live to themselves only. What little talent they have is used in their own business, and never upon their Lord’s concerns.” (Spurgeon)

Yet “albeit this man was doing nothing for his master, he did not think himself an unprofitable servant. He exhibited no self-depreciation, no humbling, no contrition. He was as bold as brass, and said unblushingly, ‘Lo, there thou hast that is thine.’” (Spurgeon)

His knowledge of the master is different from that of the first two. Does his picture portray that of Jesus who went to the Cross to die for those he loved?

We can say of the work of the third servant:

- He didn’t *think*.
- He didn’t *work*.
- He didn’t even *try*.
- He made *excuses*.

(26-30) The third servant is judged

The condemnation of this third servant – here called a **wicked and lazy servant** – was strong. The sovereignty of the master never excused the laziness of the servant. It condemned that laziness all the more. We rarely see laziness as a real sin, something that must be repented of before the Lord. If laziness were a calling or a spiritual gift, this man would have been excellent.

Those who don’t work for the Lord, or pray, or don’t evangelize because God is sovereign condemn themselves by their laziness. By their actions (or lack of action) they show that they are like the wicked servant in the parable. They do not know their Master’s heart at all. “The lord of the unprofitable servant tells him, that the fault lay in his own sloth and wickedness, and his dread of his lord’s security was but a mere frivolous pretence and unreasonable excuse.” (Poole)

We might say that this servant did not have a proper fear of his master, but an unfitting fear of risk and failure. “See how fear may become the mother of presumption. Faith in God

begets holy fear; but servile fear is the parent of doubt, which in its turn has a family of unbelieving rebels.” (Spurgeon)

This man could have done *something* with what he had. Even if it had not doubled, it would have gained some **interest** for the master’s money.

“The Old Testament forbade Israelites from charging interest against one another (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:35-37; Deuteronomy 23:19; cf. Psalm 15:5 ...); but interest on money loaned to Gentiles was permitted (Deuteronomy 23:20) ... By New Testament times Jewish scholars had already distinguished between ‘lending at interest’ and ‘usury’ (in the modern sense).” (Carson)

There are those who have things (like the servant with one talent), but hold them in such a way that it is as if they have nothing. These ones will find what they had **taken away**. Those who hold what they have received as faithful men and women, to them **more will be given**.

“But if a man *hath not*, that is, hath, but is as if he had... We need not wait for the great future, to obtain this multiplication or withdrawal of our talents. They are already waxing or waning in our hands.” (Meyer)

Cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness:

Just as there was a sense of heaven in the destiny for the two faithful servants, there is a strong sense of *hell* in the destiny for the **wicked and lazy servant**.

In the larger context of Matthew 25, the main point of this parable is clear: our readiness for Jesus’ return is determined by our stewardship of the resources that He has given us. What does it mean to be about the father’s business?

Some think that readiness for Jesus’ return is a very spiritual and abstract thing. It really isn’t - it is a matter of being about our business for the Lord. In light of this parable, we must ask ourselves: What have we done with our knowledge? Our time? Our money? Our abilities? The sins of *omission* [what we don’t do] may ultimately be more dangerous than the sins of *commission* [what we do].