

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Talents

Part 7 - June 24, 2007

[VIDEO: SKAGIT STATE BANK]

Imagine going to the bank to see how much interest you'd earned on an old certificate of deposit, and they said: "None." They buried your money in the ground! In the parable of the talents, Jesus warns us that God has invested in each of us, and He expects a return on His deposit.

[The kingdom of heaven] will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. "'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. - *Matthew 25:14-30 NIV*



The "talents" that Jesus talks about in this parable were the largest units of currency in use at that time. Do you remember that a denarius is equal to a day's pay? A talent is equal to 6000 denarii (i.e. 20 years wages)! The word "talent" is like how we use the term "million".

Our definition of “talent” (as an ability) actually comes from *this* parable. The servants were given different amounts of *talents* according to their differing levels of *ability*.

To one he gave five ... to another two ... and to another one ... each according to his ability. – *Matthew 25:15 NIV*

Jesus accepts us and uses us, whatever our gifts or skills or resources or advantages or handicaps. This master wasn’t looking for a preset profit; he simply expected faithfulness. Now, obviously the money in this story symbolizes something else. Here’s a formula for what the talents stand for:



+



+



Chicken Soup

Kleenex

Doorbell

A talent is an *ability* plus an *opportunity*, which is accompanied by some level of *risk*. In this particular formula: Your “Ability” might be cooking, caring, or kindness. Your “opportunity” might be a neighbor who gets sick. The “risk” involved might be ringing their door bell. So, the talents in this parable represent: Ability plus opportunity accompanied by risk. And ability is a gift, skill, resource, or advantage unique to us.

It’s tempting to sympathize with the one-talent servant. He just wanted to do what was safe. He was afraid to take the risk. But, this master would’ve had existing business plans and business associates this servant could’ve taken advantage of. And the few people who had the kind of wealth Jesus describes, had *huge* opportunities, and *little* competition, for investing it.



It’d be like turning over the sole concession stand at Safeco Field. You have the people and the plan. All you have to do is open the doors! He didn’t do what was safest, but laziest! He actually put his master’s money *in jeopardy*! If anything had happened to him, those 6000 denarii would’ve been irretrievable.

The one-talent servant isn’t just lazy, he’s wicked! He deliberately wastes the opportunity he was given, because he *disrespects* his master. Just listen to his spiteful claims:

I knew that you are a hard man [demanding, difficult], harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed [unfair, unjust].
So I was afraid [it’s your fault, you monster!] ... - *Matthew 25:24b-25a NIV*

He justifies his actions by accusing and blaming the *master*! But, this doesn’t sound like the man who entrusts his fortunes to *servants*, praises them equally for their efforts, rewards them generously, and invites them to celebrate alongside him!

- The other two were *eager* to invest: they “went at once”
- And, they were *excited* to present: “See, I have gained”

Number three was intentional about *not* investing ... because he had a bad attitude toward the master ... because he didn’t know him as the openhanded, kindhearted, big-giver that, in reality, he was. And the master exposes a lie, by the flaw in his logic:

So you knew that I ... gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers ... - *Matthew 25:26b-27 NIV*

“Your actions don’t betray fear; but the lack it! If you feared standing before me to answer for your decisions, you would have obeyed at least the bare minimum of my instructions.”



A few days before He was crucified, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives and told this parable to His disciples. Jesus was the master about to go on a journey, and He was entrusting His servants to invest what He has spent three years giving them. There are several great lessons to glean from this story:

1. God has given me talents.

There’s no such thing as a no-talent servant. You’ve been given gifts, skills, capabilities, experiences, and personality traits for a purpose that is unique to you and you alone. It’s up to you how to spend ‘em: waste ‘em or invest ‘em.

Q: Does the Lord have *unlimited access* to your abilities? Are you mindful of His presence and responsive to His will at any given moment; or, are some places off-limits to Him?

If He’s off-limits at work, that’s 40 hours a week you’ve buried!

2. God expects a return on His investment.

Q: A ‘Day of Accounting’ is coming; are you ready for your audit? You won’t get credit for intellect, ingenuity, or popularity, just faithfulness; what did you do with what you were given?

3. Talents were meant to be risked.

Anything worthwhile involves an element of risk.

Q: Do you know why God likes us to take risk it all for Him?

A: Risk requires faith ... if it’s safe, you don’t need faith.

- Let's face it: He likes it when we sweat a bit!

It's risky to love an enemy, make restitution, or restore a marriage. Frontline obedience brings the possibility of loss, embarrassment, hurt, disappointment, and ridicule. But He'd rather have you lean on Him and totally fail than to stay safe, attempt nothing, and succeed!

4. Buried talents are taken away.

Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. - *Matthew 25:28 NIV*

- If I risk nothing, I lose everything.



Q: Did you hear about the car they exhumed last week?



The city of Tulsa, Oklahoma buried a brand new 1957 Plymouth Belvedere in a time capsule, 50 years ago! This is what a restored one looks like. People guessed the population of the future Tulsa, and the winner (or their heir) would receive the: "priceless antique in 2007". Here's what they unearthed. This universe is *lethal* to talents that are neglected. Buried talents are taken away. It's not a threat; it's a simple fact. The only way to hold onto a talent is to use it.

For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. - *Matthew 25:29 NIV*

Feed a capacity for music, sympathy, prayer, kindness, service, or compassion, and it'll grow with an ever-deeper root. Neglect it, and it will slowly rot away. Those who step out and apply the abilities God gave them, to the opportunities He shows them, will receive more and more from God.

Although the five-talent servant and the two-talent servant had different results, their faithfulness was rewarded the same: Both received praise: "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Both received approval: "You have been faithful with a few things." Both received a promotion: "I will put you in charge of many things." Both received pleasure: "Come and share your master's happiness!"

This promise is for any disciple who doesn't bury the Belvedere! Let's see how well you've been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this passage, we've learned that:

1. An unavoidable, inevitable day of accounting is coming.
2. Though not equally *talented*, we're equally *accountable*.
3. God will punish every believer who risks and fails.
4. Only God can judge the true significance of your talents.