

“A Parable of Talents”

Jesus told a story about a rich landowner who went on a long trip. He gathered his servants together and entrusted to them his property to take care of while he was gone. Turn to Matthew 25. To one he gave 5 talents. To another 2 talents. To another, 1. A “talent” was a weight, usually measured in silver. It was probably worth about \$1,000 in Jesus’ time. That was a huge sum – worth more than 15 years of wages for the average laborer back then! So, even the one who got just 1 talent had a lot to be responsible for.

After distributing his property to them, he went away, for a long time. While he was gone, the man who had received 5 talents went and traded, and got 5 more. The one with 2 talents, also doubled what he had been given. But the one who received the 1 talent dug a hole and hid his master’s money.

After a long time, the master returns. It’s time to check in and see what the servants did with what he entrusted to them. The one given 5 talents said, “Here are your 5 talents, and I’ve gained 5 more.” The master’s response? “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21). The servant given the 2 talents reported, “You gave me 2. Here are 4!” The master responds in a similar way: “Well done, good and faithful servant. You’ve been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”

Then the servant who had been given the 1 talent comes forth, and this happens: “Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours’” (Matthew 25:24-25). Notice, he didn’t *lose* the 1 talent. He just didn’t do anything to increase it.

How did the master respond? “But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest’” (Matthew 25:26-27).

This is a *parable*. A parable about the *kingdom of God*. It tells us something about how God operates, how God rules. Parables have *one main point*. One central message. What do you think is the defining message in this parable?

Well, it’s a parable about *stewardship*. *God owns everything. We are only stewards, caretakers, managers. And each of us will give an account of how we’ve managed the things God has entrusted to us.*

This whole concept of stewardship doesn’t thrill a lot of people today! “What do you mean this stuff isn’t mine? It’s my house, my car, my clothes, my money!” I think of the orange juice container for *Florida’s Natural*. On the container it says, “We own the land, we own the trees, we own the company.” I know what that mean. It’s a co-op. But they don’t own the land, or the

trees. Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is *the Lord’s*, and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” The world – and all that’s in it! Psalm 50:10 “Every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.” I don’t own anything. Everything I have is God’s.

You may say, “Wait a minute! I’ve worked hard for what I have. I haven’t stolen it from anyone. It’s mine.” Now I believe in honest labor. And enjoying the fruits of our hard work. But all the stuff we have is just borrowed for a while. It won’t be our 100 years from now. Right? And also, it’s good to keep in mind that it’s God who gives us the strength and ability to work. Many disabled people can’t. And we could have been born in Communist China or Haiti. People there work very hard but don’t have near what we have in the U.S.

Everything we have is a gift of God and belongs to God. We are only caretakers, managers. Jesus’ parable reminds us that someday we will face God and give an account of what we’ve done with what God has entrusted to us. Most people, I would guess, don’t live with this perspective in mind. But if I believe there is a God who holds me accountable for what I do with what I’ve been given, I’m going to live differently than if I think I don’t have to answer to anyone.

In this parable that we’re looking at, we’ve already mentioned that each of the 3 servants were entrusted with differing amounts (5 talents, 2 talents, 1 talent). This is reality, isn’t it? God’s entrusted us with differing amounts of talents, abilities, money, opportunities. We’re not all given the same. Inmates of a prison had a joke book that they had passed around so many times that the prisoners just about had the whole book memorized. Rather than wasting words telling the jokes, after a while they just began to recite the number of the joke. So, one guy would call out #32! And all would roar with laughter. Another would yell out: “#8! And the inmates would hoot and howl! A new man worked hard to memorize the jokes, so he could feel included. Finally, he took his turn: #86 he yelled out. And there was dead silence. “Hey,” he said, “what’s with you guys! This is a funny joke. How come nobody’s laughing?” One of the long-time prisoners said, “Well, some people can tell ‘em, and others can’t.”

We all know that we differ in what God’s given us. Some of us have a lot of talent, brains... good jobs...good looks...and others of us think we must have been out to lunch when God apportioned out those things! That doesn’t matter. The question is, “How are we using what God *has* given us?”

With this parable of Jesus in mind (the parable of the talents), let’s challenge ourselves to be good stewards and managers of life and its gifts. How about *the stewardship of our body*. You know the routine. You could preach this part of the sermon. Take care of our body. Get enough rest. Eat healthy food. Exercise. Of course, just talking about these things doesn’t do any good, if we don’t practice them, right? Like the 70 year old who wanted to trim off some fat and be more fit. He joined a fitness center. He felt really good about that. 6 months later, however, there was no change in his physique and muscle tone. When he complained to a friend about it, the friend said, “How often do you go to the gym?” “Go?” the guy said. You mean you have to go!”

It's good for Jesus followers to remember that our body is a temple, or dwelling place of God's Spirit. We want to provide a good home for the Holy Spirit by taking care of our bodies.

Then there is *the stewardship of our mind*. The human mind is an amazing creation of God! If we're followers of Jesus, we are to have the mind of Christ. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus", it says in Philippians 2:5. We are to think like Jesus, have the same mindset!

We can fill our mind with all kinds of trashy things. We wouldn't think of going to the trash can, filling a plate with what's in there, then eating it. But we can feed our mind on garbage – from the TV, films, books, the internet. (*Hold up a cell phone*). For the present generation, this is a game changer when it comes to being good stewards of our mind. How often do we see people with their head buried in it. In the waiting room at the doctor's office. While eating at home or in a restaurant. Some kids don't know how to socialize because the cell phone has taken over their lives.

Now, some of you feel rather smug! "I'm not into cell phones and computers!" I know you're not! But it's hard to function in today's world without knowing how to use a cell phone and a computer? It's not so good to close our minds to new things and new ideas and changing realities.

Being a good steward of our mind involves: using our intellect and developing our mind, even in our senior years; having a clean mind and clean thoughts; trying to view people and have the same perspective on life as Jesus did.

How about the stewardship of our time. When it comes to talents, intelligence, material possessions, God has blessed us to different degrees. But one thing we all have in common is that we all have 24 hours in a day and 168 hours in a week.

Some of us tend to *waste* time – we fritter away this precious gift of life majoring in minors – trivial things – self-focused things. Things that have little or no eternal significance. It's all about me, me, me. Others of us can get caught up in *busyness* – we crowd too many things into our schedules by working too much, or overextending ourselves with too many commitments, so there's little time just to relax, or read a good book, or pray, or visit a sick or lonely person. Ephesians 5:15-16 says, "Be careful, then, how you live not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil."

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The stewardship of our talents. All of us have talents and abilities God's entrusted us with. All of us are good at something! You've probably heard or read of some of the research done on the brain – how the left and right sides of our brain serve different functions. The left hemisphere controls language, logic. The right hemisphere has to do with our creative or artistic side, and the emotions.

God's created some of us to be more "left brain people". Maybe we're good at math, science,

using logic and planning. We might be good at organizing things, and have administrative skills. We can dedicate ourselves and these skills to God, maybe to provide order in our household, to bless people, to serve in the church, to make life better.

God created some of us to be more “right brain people”. We’re creative, artistic. God’s given us a talent, a flair to paint, or create music, or crochet, or act on a stage. People can use talents like this to make money, or in some way to toot our own horn. Nothing wrong with using these creative talents to earn a living or make money. But we can also say, “Lord, you’ve given me this ability. I humbly dedicate it to your use and service.” I’m thinking of a young lady in one of the congregations I served. She had a beautiful voice. She’d occasionally sing in church, but I could never get her to sing on a regular basis. She hoped for a professional career as a singer. For a while she was in a group that sang in bars and night clubs. But her dream of singing as her profession never got off the ground. I felt bad that I could never get her that interested in singing for the Lord. It’s sad if we take our God-given talents and use them purely for self-gain.

We probably remember Stewart Payne, the professional golfer who was killed in the crash of a private Lear jet – 26 years ago yesterday. One report said that Payne Stewart had a spiritual transformation the beginning of that year (1999). Upon winning his last major golf tournament, he said, “I’m proud of the fact that my faith in God is so much stronger and I’m so much more at peace with myself than I’ve ever been in my life. *The Lord’s given me the ability that He wants me to use so I can stand up here and give Him the praise.*”

Then, of course, beyond just exercising good stewardship of our bodies and minds and time and talents, there is the whole matter of *our stewardship of planet earth*. Right now, this is the only place we’ve got! (I don’t think any of us have any immediate plans to relocate to Mars or any of the other planets)! Conserving our natural resources, working together as citizens for clean air and clean water, cutting down our use of plastic...we can do our little thing as citizens to treasure the environment, but it will take nations, working together, to care for the earth. (This presents a problem, when nations like China and India don’t care how much they pollute planet earth). Somewhere, between those who are probably too much alarmists over global warming and environmental pollution, and those on the other extreme who just don’t care about the problem, there is a tremendous need for us to respect and preserve the good earth God has created. And Christians should be leading the way!

“Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21). Every one of us will one day will give an account to God of what we’ve done with what God has entrusted to us. We will be judged on how we manage our body, our mind, our time, our talents. And how we all manage the gift of this earthly home.

And the parable seems to suggest that for those who are faithful in taking care of what God puts in our hands, He will entrust us with even greater things, in this life, and maybe even in the life to come.

