

Investing in the Kingdom

Reading: Matthew 25:14-30

What would you say was the most famous parable Jesus ever told?

The Parable of the Prodigal Son.

It has called this "The world's most perfect short story."

It has been told & retold around the world because of its universal application.

What would you say was the most affectionate parable Jesus told?

The Parable of the Lost Sheep.

The shepherd went out looking for the sheep that had gone astray until finally he found the one that had gone astray. Then he brings it home, rejoicing.

What about this parable we read today?

It is one of the most practical...how to act and react with God.

Let's set the context.

This parable comes in the section of Matthew's gospel where Jesus is giving an answer to the disciples' question about His Second Coming in Matthew 24:3:

"...When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

Jesus helps them understand that once He leaves, He will come again.

He challenges them in Matthew 24:44 to be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour when He is least expected.

In chapter 25, Jesus compares His coming to the eastern custom of a bridegroom arriving in the middle of the night.

He finishes by saying in 25:13: "Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Chapter 25 ends with the separation of the sheep and the goats.

Sandwiched in-between is the parable of the talents.

Notice verse 14: "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey..."

The word "again" indicates that Jesus is using yet one more parable to explain future events.

The man going on a "journey" is Jesus.

So what do we learn from this parable?

Firstly, what we have is not ours.

In verse 14 this man who was getting ready for a journey,

"...called his servants and entrusted His property to them."

It was common for wealthy men to take long journeys.

When we go away on holidays we have to make provisions.

Someone to pick up the mail, feed the cat and dog, kill the goldfish.

These wealthy men would do that too.

But they would also delegate the control and multiplication of their wealth to trustworthy employees.

They were expected to bring a return on what had been handed over to them.

These servants were given property and money that belonged to the master.

Their job was to manage what they were given.

Likewise, we must remember that everything we have has been given to us and is not really ours anyway.

Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.”

Haggai 2:8 adds, “The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the LORD Almighty.”

He has the rights, and I have the responsibility.

He is the Master and I am the manager.

I am the servant; He is the sovereign.

Have you allowed this basic principle to saturate your life and thinking?

You don’t really own anything.

Everything belongs to the Lord.

Until we recognize this truth, you will not be a good manager of what has been entrusted to you.

Our days are in His hands.

Our gifts and abilities are on loan from Him.

Our money, houses, cars, clothes, and every possession we have doesn’t belong to us.

We really don’t own anything.

Secondly we’re given what we can handle.

In verse 15 we read that various talents were given to three servants, each according to his ability.

A talent was a measure of weight.

Its value varied depending on whether it was copper, silver, or gold...

But it was always a large amount.

While commentators differ on the exact amount, most agree that it would take an ordinary labourer almost twenty years to earn just one talent.

To put this into perspective in our society, I checked found out that the Full-time adult ordinary time earnings is \$1,183/week (approx \$60,000pa)

So a talent would be the equivalent of about \$1.2million.

So one servant got \$6million; another 2.4 million
and the smallest amount 1.2mil...still a lot of money!

That reminds us that God gives out of His abundance to us!

Notice that each servant received talents “according to his ability.”

Your responsibility is tied to your ability.

This is very interesting.

God’s kingdom purposes do not operate according to what is “fair” but according to what is best.

Yes, we are all equal in the eyes of God.

But when it comes to our abilities, we are as different as different can be.

God simply did not make us all the same.

There are some people who can handle five talents;
there are some who can handle only one.

The important thing to remember is that each servant was given something.

No one was left idle.

You may not be a five-talent person, but you have some talent.

We all do.

And I think that there are a whole lot more one and two talent people in this world than there are five talent people.

There are some people who seem to have it all.

But most of us are just one or two talent servants.

JC Ryle says, ‘Anything whereby we may glorify God is a talent.’

Our gifts, our influence, our money, our knowledge, our health, our strength, our time, our senses, our reason, our intellect, our memory, our affections, our privileges as members of Christ’s Church, our advantage as those who have Bibles...all are talents.

You have what you have...because God gave it to you.
And He expects you to manage His gifts within the boundaries of ability that He has wired into you.

God knows what we can handle.

Our job is to be faithful with whatever amount we have to work with.
Do we trust that God knows more about us than we even know about ourselves?

Thirdly we must invest what we've been given.

We read that the first two went and put their money to work and doubled the amount.
But the third went off, dug a hole and buried it.

The practice of hiding valuables in the ground was quite common back then.
It was one of the safest—and least profitable—ways of protecting possessions.

Because Antonio's voice was high and squeaky, he did not make the auditions for the Cremona Boy's Choir.
When he took violin lessons, the neighbours persuaded his parents to make him stop.
Yet Antonio still wanted to make music.

His friends gave him a hard time because his only talent was whittling.
When Antonio was older he served as an apprentice to a violinmaker.
His knack for whittling grew into a skill of carving and his hobby became his craft.
He worked patiently and faithfully.

By the time he died, he left over 1,500 violins, each one bearing a label that read,
"Antonio Stradivarius."
They are the most sought-after violins in the world and sell for \$100,000s each.

Antonio couldn't sing or play or preach or teach but his responsibility was to use his ability, and his violins are still making beautiful music today.

Our potential is God's gift to us.
Zig Ziglar has said, "You are the only person on earth who can use your ability."

Are you investing what you've been given, regardless of how much it is?
Or, have you buried your blessing and kept it hidden from others?

4. A day of accountability is coming.

We'll have to give an account for how we've used what we've been given.
Look at verse 19: "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them."

Jesus is coming again and there will be a day of reckoning.

While we wait, let's be faithful in doing whatever He gives us to do.

Your job may be big or small, but whatever it is, do it to the best of your ability and you'll be ready.

Before you get concerned about the concept of a works based salvation being talked about here in the parable you need to remember that the work the servants do doesn't first of all make them a part of the Master's household.

They already are a part of it from the start.

It is in that already existing relationship that they are given the work to do.

So our value, our place in God's family doesn't depend on what we do...

On our faith and efforts for God.

Our place is based on what someone else has done...on what Jesus has done.

That's why there's a cross standing at the front here - to remind us of His work, His ultimate sacrifice.

We are brought into a relationship with our Heavenly Father by accepting Jesus Christ's saving work on our behalf.

All we do is open our lives to His divine presence and control.

Nothing we do can add to what He has already done.

The parable is not about Justification by works.

Grace precedes *work*

But it gives a picture of what kind of faith is needed...

Not a dead faith...that saves no one.

A live faith is a doing faith.

There is an unbreakable connection between what we believe and what we do.

If we have been saved...it will express itself in faithful and loving service to our master, Jesus Christ.

5. What we do with what we have reveals our view of God.

The servants given the 5 and 2 talents excitedly brought back double what was entrusted to them.

They were eager to show what they had gained.

They were bubbling with enthusiasm.

And these two faithful servants received:

Affirmation: "Great job! Well done."

Promotion: "Since you've done so well with what I've given you, I'm going to give you even more responsibility and opportunity for growth."

Celebration: "You've made me very happy. Let's celebrate together!"

They were faithful and were called good because they had a right view of the master.

Likewise, when we see God for who He is, we will want to be faithful and we'll focus on doing good things.

The one-talent guy came a bit more reluctantly to the master and said in verse 24: "...I knew that you were a hard man..."

He had a wrong view of the master.
He looked at him as someone who was hard and harsh, instead of loving and gracious.

A.W. Tozer was right when he said that what we think about God is the most important thing about us. If we view God as a tyrant then we'll filter everything through this lens. Some of you may be secretly angry with God because you think He did something, or didn't do something that you think He should have. As a result, your view of Him is skewed. Your preconceived notions prevent you from seeing Him as a God of grace, and as a result you refuse to serve Him with what He's given you. When we blame God we end up burying our blessings.

A faulty view of God can also lead to excuses. In verse 25 this man declares that the reason he didn't do anything with what he had been given was because he was afraid, so he decided to play it safe. He hid the money to make sure it wouldn't be lost. And he accomplished exactly what he set out to achieve: nothing.

A wrong view of God always leads to fear.
A right view of God always leads to faith.

6. What we have we must use or what we have we will lose.

Verse 26 reveals that the master saw right through the flimsy excuses of the servant when he said, "You wicked, lazy servant!"

Wicked because he accused his master unjustly.
Lazy because he did nothing with what he had been given to use.

A distinguishing mark of a true Christian is service and giving.
A lack of service betrays a heart where Jesus doesn't really live.
A Christian who is not using what God has given is a contradiction in terms.

All the way through Scripture Jesus is constantly challenging us to invest & reinvest again & again in the Kingdom.

And He will always honour the investment.
He will never honour those who are afraid & who bury their talents in the back yard.

God's principles are clear. Jesus said, "Work while it is day. The night is coming when you won't be able to work anymore. So roll up your sleeves. Get busy, & don't stop."

The message of the parable has not changed. God is still the master.

He is still the giver of all good things.

Without His generosity we would have nothing.

Our talents and gifts come from God...they are his.

So He says, "Invest what I have given you & see what will happen."

Conculsion

So what are we going to do with what God has given us?

After all, we're just ordinary people.

Are we afraid?

Are we going to run out to the backyard & bury our talents?

Or are we going to stand up & realize that He still honours those who have the faith to invest in His kingdom?

The truth is, God has given to each of us an enormous trust, to use our life, according to our ability, to further his kingdom.

And if I understand this parable correctly, we are not supposed to play it safe, to bury the various treasures that God has given us, but to take the risk of using and investing those gifts to increase God's kingdom.

Can there be any greater example of what this parable means than to look at the life of Jesus. Although being the master's Son, he risked it all, he gave his all on the cross that we might, through faith, come to be those whom God trusts with his inheritance.

I know that each of us have been blessed in many ways, with many talents, entrusted to us by God. May we, through the power of God's Spirit, be open to using those gifts to further our master's kingdom.

William Willimon concluded his commentary with this story. "I know somebody whom God has given only one talent, from what I can see. God has given her the talent of being the best baker of oatmeal cookies, at least in her neighbourhood. But she never bakes a batch of cookies for her family or friends that she doesn't expand the recipe and make a batch for the prisoners at the county jail. She ties these cookies in little packages, and in her graceful handwriting writes, "I know you are going through a rough time. But God loves you. God wants to be with you.

Being able to bake good cookies is not a huge talent. But when used in service to God's kingdom, it can be a marvellous gift."

God has blessed each of us in many ways. And I believe that if we are open to the power of God's Spirit, God can enable us to use those gifts to further his kingdom. And the neat thing about it is...that all of our lives will be enriched.