

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Broadcast Date: 6 July 2008

No. T0529

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Valuing what God has given us - The talents God gives us

At two levels we are responsible to God for the way we live our lives. At the most basic level, as creatures of God, we are responsible to the God Who created us. In addition, if we are Christians, believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, we are responsible to our Lord and Master for how we value, take care of and use the many talents He has given us. As the Bible tells us in 1 Peter 4:10, we are not owners, but stewards, of whatever the Lord has entrusted to us.

There are two basic sides to this question. First of all, we may be assured that if the Lord wants us to do something for Him, He will equip us to be able to do it. What talent or talents He gives us is within the realm of His own sovereign choice. What a tremendous honour this is! What a dignity is conferred upon us that the Lord chooses to use us in this way! Secondly, we are, of course, responsible to Him for how we use the talents He chooses to give us.

The first side of the question, God's side, is illustrated in The Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30. The second side, our responsibility, is considered in The Parable of the Pounds in Luke 19:11-27. Please read these two portions through as soon as you get the opportunity, and refresh your memory on the details.

Let us look first, then, at Matthew 25:14-30, the so-called "Parable of the Talents". The text considers the case of a business man who is going away for a time. He hands over to three of his responsible servants what, in relative terms, is listed as five pounds, two pounds and one pound. This is in accordance with his own assessment of how well they will use these resources for him while he himself is away on other business. They are his resources or assets, and the choice of which and how much of each he entrusts to each servant is within his own disposition. The parable suggests the way in which each servant values what has been given to him, as demonstrated in what use he makes of it or them. On his return, the master makes known his assessment of how well or otherwise each servant has acted on his behalf, during his absence. That is, they are required to give an account of their stewardship on his behalf. Then, after making his appraisal known, the master either rewards or disciplines each servant as he sees fit.

The picture presented in Luke 19:11-27 is rather different. There can be no reasonable doubt that the nobleman of the parable, the man of noble birth, who went to a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, is intended to be a picture of the Lord Jesus Himself. He has gone to heaven, to await the time when He will return and set up His kingdom. Quite clearly, in this respect, there was to be an interval between His going away, when He ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives, and His coming back. The Lord Jesus will answer to that parable in a remarkable way.

It is abundantly plain that the servants are a picture of His disciples, who are, themselves, an indication of those, including ourselves, who since then have expressed our allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ by trusting Him as Saviour and confessing Him as Lord. Having done so, we are responsible to act for Him, as His representatives, while we wait for Him to come back again. The question is, how will we be able to do that?

The Lord then proceeded to develop the detail of the parable. There were ten servants. Why ten? It's one of those things you can skip over for many years, then once you've noticed it, it jumps out of the page at you wherever you look. Consistently, throughout the Bible, the number ten is brought in when responsibility is under consideration. Man is a creature, responsible to God for his every action, word or thought. We should not be surprised, therefore, that the number ten comes so often into the text when man's responsibility is at stake. To proceed, then: Each of the ten servants receives one pound. Each servant is made to realise that he is equally, personally and individually responsible to his master as steward of whatever has been entrusted to his care.

In Luke 2:49 we read that even when the Lord Jesus was as young as twelve, he explained to Joseph and Mary, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" His life on earth was spent in devoted service to His Father in heaven. Similarly, we Christians should devote our lives on earth to being busy in His service. We are to represent Him on earth while He is in heaven, as He on earth represented His Father Who was in heaven.

Added urgency was given to the message by the added phrase, "till I come". The servants were not given a specific time for the master's return. They were given a job to do for him in his absence. They knew that he was coming back. In the meantime, they had to get on with his business, on his behalf, knowing that he might come back at any time.

The exact moment of his return was unknown to them, but he would come back, of that there was no doubt. They could be absolutely sure. He had said so.

What a lovely picture of the present position of the Christian! What a sharp challenge! Saved by the precious blood of Jesus! Ready for heaven while living on earth! Saved to serve, until the Master's return! There is so much to do, and so little time in which to do it. However, for the moment, back to the parable!

Verse 15 reads, "And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading." The time for the review of the servants' stewardship had come. How would they have valued what the master had entrusted to them? Three test cases are examined. They are samples of the kind of response that arises when servants are given responsibilities, or to put it another way, are given the opportunity to act and work on their master's behalf. It isn't necessary to examine all ten in detail to get a comprehensive, overall picture, or to learn the necessary lessons.

The first servant had earned ten pounds with the one pound committed to him. He was aware that the original pound was not His own. At his appraisal, he speaks to his master of 'thy pound'. Conscious of that, he had used it, as well as he was able, to promote the interests of his master. The master commended the servant. He had been faithful in respect of what was relatively very little. Because of that, he would be given greater responsibility. Doing a small job well proved he was fit to be given a bigger job. When the kingdom was finally set up, he would be given administrative responsibility for ten cities.

The servant who had gained five pounds was similarly commended and rewarded. He had similar understanding of his responsibility to trade well with his master's pound. "Thy pound has gained five pounds." Likewise, the master's assessment was, "You have done well. You have been faithful. You shall have responsibility over five cities."

The third example is very much different. This servant hadn't traded at all. He had wrapped up, in a cloth, the pound allocated to him and hidden it to keep it safe. His excuse was futile. He said he knew that his master was a harsh, unforgiving man who would make no allowance at all for anything less than total success. For that reason, he hadn't dared to enter into trade with it. "There it is", he said, "you can have it back, just as you gave it to me. No harm done." Oh, dear! In so doing, and so saying, he merely showed that he didn't really know his master at all. Think of it. If his own declared assessment of his master was accurate, surely he wouldn't have dared to act as he had. He would have done his utmost to show a profit in what the master had given him to do. As always in such cases, the master took the servant at his own word. "Alright," he said. "In your estimation, I am a hard taskmaster. I will take you at your own word. I will accept your own assessment of me. I will judge you by your own standards. If what you say is right, why did you not, at the very least, invest the money in the bank, so that I would receive interest on the capital? You are clearly totally unfit to be given any responsibility at all. The pound previously given to you will now be transferred to someone who knows me better, and will serve me more faithfully. Take it from him", he instructed. "Give it to the servant who has built up his pound to ten on my behalf." "But, master", protested some of those servants, "that one has ten already". "That's the whole point", said the master, "I gave him one. He has made that up into ten. Of course he is the right one to be given more." And so passed into common usage the telling observation, "To him that hath shall be given. To him that hath not shall be taken away what he hath". On first hearing, that sounds a bit of a conundrum. When you think about it, it is perfectly plain. To the servant who had used his opportunity well, more, or greater, opportunities would rightly be given. The servant, who had done nothing at all with his opportunity to serve the master, had demonstrated that he wasn't fit to be given any opportunity at all. Isn't it right? Isn't it fair? Doing a job well demonstrates the capacity to take on more responsibility. Making a mess of a first, small job gives no confidence that more responsibility should be given to such a servant.

Again, the very words are a picture of what will happen when the Lord Jesus reviews the life and service of each Christian believer at The Judgment Seat of Christ, as taught in such scriptures as 1 Corinthians 3 and 2 Corinthians 5. Note the language of the parable here. "He commanded!" He certainly will! "That He might know!" Of course He does! He knows everything! He doesn't need to ask to find out. But the servant needs to know that the master knows. He needs to be made to feel his own responsibility.

The parable ends, as so many do, with a final word of caution. There will be a final day of judgment. When that day comes for you and me, dear Christian friend, where will we stand? As in the parable, the Lord Jesus Christ will come again to receive for Himself a kingdom. How can we be sure? God has said so, in His word. "God has appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He has ordained, whereof He has given assurance unto all men, in that He has raised Him from the dead." (Acts 17:31)

Overall, and fundamentally, this is a plea for wholehearted Christianity. Lock, stock and barrel! Hook, line and sinker! In for a penny, in for a pound! Fully committed, wholehearted, total Christianity! We shall demonstrate how we value

the talents the Lord has given us by how we use them on His behalf. But what are they, these talents, these assets, these resources?

Well, there are certain major helps that God in His goodness has made available to all Christians. In particular, there is The Holy Spirit, Who indwells every believer on the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no power like Him, and the power He applies. Then, there is the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, giving guidance in all circumstances and for all purposes. In addition, there is the wonderful facility of prayer, by which we can keep in constant touch with our Lord and Master. On the latter point, the resources available are tremendous, but we are never ever left independent of the one who has given them to us. Knowing that, how much time do we spend in prayer? This is perhaps the most important thing of all in that if we do everything as a result of prayer and in a spirit of prayerful dependence upon God, we shall be much more likely to be able to give a good account of our stewardship. We must first of all ask for help, then give thanks for help received.

In a secondary way, we have each been given a certain amount of ability and time and material resources. They no doubt vary from person to person, because the Lord fits every individual with whatever talent is needed to fulfil the exact job the Lord wishes each believer to do.

The burning question is always, "How can I know what the Lord wants me to do? How do I know what talent has been allocated to me?" Let me tell you this in all sincerity. There is never ever a shortage of very valuable work to be done for the Lord. But there is always an apparent shortage of workers who are both able and willing to do the work. If the Lord makes you aware of a particular need, you do what you can to meet that need. Don't hang about waiting for someone else to do it. You get on with it. The Lord will soon show you whether or not He has given you the necessary talent. Furthermore, the best way for a talent to be developed is for it to be put to use, put to work in the work of the Lord. If we do a little job well, this might well lead to the Lord giving us a bigger, or more responsible job to do for Him.

One thing we must always remember. If I decline to use the talent that the Lord has given me, and refuse to be available to the Lord to carry out what He wants me to do for Him, the Lord Himself won't suffer. Long term, the work itself won't suffer. However, the Lord will prompt and equip someone else to do what I have refused to do. But I will suffer. I will have forgone the opportunity to do what the Lord wanted me to do on that specific occasion. I will have lost the opportunity to hear His "Well done" in respect of that particular job. Time and opportunities are too important to waste.

We don't know the day, or the hour, but come He will. In the meantime, let us work faithfully for Him while we wait for Him to come. But is there enough work to do to keep every committed Christian busily occupied until the coming of the Lord? Assuredly! Listen to the grand words of Elsie Duncan Yale.

*There's a work for Jesus ready at your hand,
'Tis a task the Master just for you has planned.
Haste to do His bidding, yield Him service true;
There's a work for Jesus, none but you can do.*

*There's a work for Jesus, humble though it be,
'Tis the very service He would ask of thee.
Go where fields are whitened, and the labourers few;
There's a work for Jesus, none but you can do.*

*There's a work for Jesus, precious souls to bring,
Tell them of His mercies, tell them of your King.
Faint not, grow not weary, He will strength renew;
There's a work for Jesus, none but you can do.*

*Work for Jesus, day by day,
Serve Him ever, falter never, Christ obey.
Yield Him service, loyal, true:
There's a work for Jesus none but you can do.*

May the Lord help us so to value the talents He has given us, and use them diligently for Him, that His Name will be glorified, and others will be blessed. As a bonus, it will surely be for the blessing of our own souls.

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