

Throughout His ministry, Jesus taught by means of the parable. The parable was basically a short story in which Jesus used things and events from everyday life to get an important point across to His listeners. Jesus was the master story teller. By means of these stories, Jesus communicated life-changing truths to His disciples and people back then, and to us today who are willing to listen and learn. As you study the parables in the gospels, you soon discover that there are usually two levels of interpretation for both the listener and the reader. First, there's the surface meaning which is usually an entertaining story. But then there's the deeper spiritual meaning; the real meaning that Jesus was trying to convey. This morning let's look at one of these parables found in the 25th Chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, verses 14 through 30.

Read Matthew 25:14-30

This particular text is known as the Parable of the Talents. Now a talent was not originally a coin, but a measure of weight, around 75 pounds. However, by the time of this parable the word talent had come to refer to the value of a coin. During the Middle Ages, the English translation of the word came to mean our God-given abilities. When Jesus taught His disciples this parable, a talent was worth a lot of money, basically a worker's wages for fifteen years. One Bible translation indicates that a talent was worth \$1000. Thus even the servant who was given only one coin received a huge sum of money. This may help explain the master's anger when he returned to find that the servant had not invested the money wisely.

Like most of Jesus' parables, there was an immediate lesson for those who heard this story for the first time, and also a deeper meaning and spiritual lesson for us today. Initially when Jesus told this story it focused on the lazy servant, who represented the Scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of that time period, and their attitude towards God's Law. Similar to burying the coin, the Scribes and Pharisees wanted to keep the Law exactly as it was. They built a fence around the Law and God, and fought any change in the status quo. Like the man with the one coin, they desired to keep things and the church exactly as they were and for this Jesus condemned them. In this parable, Jesus is telling us that there can be no religion without adventure or risk. For God finds no use in a closed mind. You must be willing to experience God, open up to His guidance and His abiding presence, and go where He leads you.

For the Church and Christians today, the parable tells us several things. First, it tells us that God gives each of us different gifts. One servant received 5 coins, another 3 coins and the third one coin. Please note that it not the amount of coins or talents that matters, but how they are used. God never demands abilities from a person that they do not have; but He does demand that we make the best possible use of these abilities and gifts that we do have. As the story

illustrates, we do not all have the same amount of gifts, but we can and should put forth the same effort in using them. This story tells us that no matter what gifts we have, little or great, we must use them to the best of our ability to serve God.

As the master gave each of the three servants different amounts of money to manage, so God has given each of us different spiritual gifts to use in His service. In the text that Tony/Bonnie read earlier from 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, the Apostle Paul writes: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of activities, but the same God produces all of them in everyone. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." A spiritual gift is a skill or an ability that enables each Christian to serve the Lord. Thus, burying our talents means not using these God given gifts; it is an act of disobedience to God.

Now most of you know that the Lord has not made a bucket big enough for me to carry a tune in, which reminds me of a story that I heard about a church who had a man in their choir who also couldn't sing. Several people hinted to him that he could better serve the church in other places, but he continued to come to choir practices where he threw everybody off key, like Barney Fife on the old *Andy Griffith Show*.

Finally, the choir director became desperate and went to the pastor. "You've got to get that man out of the choir," he said. "If you don't, I'm going to resign, and all the choir members are also going to quit. Please do something." So the pastor went to the man and suggested "perhaps you should leave the choir." "Why should I leave the choir?" the man asked. "Well, five or six people have told me that you can't sing," replied the pastor. "That's nothing," the man said, "Fifty people have told me that you can't preach!" The key is that we must each find the proper place to use our gifts.

There are several key points in this story that we must not overlook. First notice that verse 16 says that when the first servant received the five coins, he went right to work. He didn't hesitate, call a committee meeting, or talk about what he was going to do; he went right to work for his master. He had a job to do and he did it. Thank God for people like that!

Also note that the second servant who received two coins worked just as hard as the one who had received five coins, and was just as cheerful. He was not jealous or complained about how much more the first servant received, but took what he was given and put his best effort into serving his master. Again, thank God for these people!

This story also tells us that the servant who was punished is the one who did not try; the one who said no to life. He dug a hole in the ground and buried his coin. The man with the one talent did not lose his talent; he simply didn't use what had been entrusted to him. In a sense,

talents are like tax deductions; you either use them or you lose them. So this parable asks each one of us: are we burying our talents? Do we hide from our responsibility as Christians?

There is always the temptation for the one talent people of this world to say: "I have so little talent that I can't do much. I can't make a difference; it's not worth trying." Between the great things we don't do and the little things we won't do is the danger that we don't do anything at all! There is also the attitude that I have done my part and it's time for the younger generation to take over. Now I hate to break the news to you, but there is no such thing as retiring from Christianity. Moses was 80 years old when God called him to return to Egypt to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land. It doesn't matter how old or how young we are or how talented we are, God expects each of us to do our best for Him each and every day.

There's the story of a farmer who asked his neighbor: "What are you going to plant this spring, Jake? Corn?" Jake replied: "Nope, I'm scared of the corn borer." "Oh," said the farmer, "Will you plant potatoes?" "Nope, too much danger of potato bugs," Jake replied. The farmer was at a loss so he said, "Well, what are you going to plant then?" "Nothing, I'm just going to play it safe." Too often we as Christians want to play it safe and do nothing.

But we must never sell our self short. God has equipped each one of us for a special task. Dwight L. Moody tells about meeting a preacher named Dr. Moon. He had been stricken blind at a young age. He became a servant of the Lord and used his abilities to translate the Bible into 72 different languages in Braille so that blind people all over the world could read the scriptures for themselves. He was naturally blind, but he had eyes in his soul and could see a bright future in eternity. He did not let any physical problem stop him from serving his Master and using his gifts to their fullest extent.

This parable also tells us that the reward of work well done is still more work to do. Here Jesus lays out a universal truth of life: to those who have, more will be given and those who do not have will lose what they have. On the surface it sounds confusing and unfair, but here's the meaning: if a person has a talent and continually exercises it, their talent increases over time. But if they have a talent and fail to use it, they will eventually lose it. The more you use it, the better your ability or talent becomes; thus you will have more of that particular talent.

Take baseball for example. If you step into the batter's box without practicing hitting, you will most likely strike out. However, if you practice hitting every day, especially with the different pitches such as fastball, curve, slider, and change-up, you will become a more consistent hitter and a better baseball player. The same is true for any sport and other activities such as playing the piano, golf, singing, cooking and many other talents. God gives us each different abilities. If we don't develop them, they are of no use to us or to God.

In this parable, each servant received the temporary use of different sums of money, each according their individual abilities. The first two servants invested wisely and doubled their money. The third did nothing with his coin and is described as wicked, lazy and worthless. Investing money can be scary as we all know these days with the ups and downs of the stock market. In the same way, putting our talents to work for the Lord can be scary too. Sometimes we fail; sometimes we lack the necessary confidence simply because we have not tested ourselves. Serving the Lord involves more than just playing it safe and doing little or nothing. It demands giving our all to the Lord, after all Jesus gave His all for us on the cross. Stepping out in faith and taking a risk is part of the message that we find in this parable.

I heard about a man who put a thousand dollars in a checking account thinking that he would have it when he retired. After keeping the deposit receipt for twenty years, he went back to the bank and got his original \$1000. But if he had been wise like the two servants and invested it, he might have doubled the amount he had for retirement. He made the mistake that a lot of Christians make, playing it safe and not using their God-given abilities. Someone said: "Weeds come by themselves; flowers require cultivation." Are we growing weeds or flowers with our lives?

Now remember that there are at least two levels of interpretation in this parable. In this story, a man entrusts each of his three servants with different sums of money. Upon his return he asks for a financial report from each one. The first two doubled what had been entrusted to them. Then the attention turns to the third servant who acted with caution not to lose what had been entrusted to him. When asked why he had not invested the money entrusted to him, he replied that his master was known as a hard man so he acted out of fear and caution.

There is no doubt that Jesus surprised and confused His audience with this parable. On the one hand, the listeners have just seen proof of the master's generosity to the other two servants. However, on the other hand, they were somewhat sympathetic to the third servant since in their culture burying the money would be considered a reasonable act. To their surprise, this servant was condemned for his inactivity and his money was given to the servant with the most money. Thus those who took the risk and lived their lives to the best for the master were the ones actually rewarded.

That's the surface story, but what's the deeper meaning? You see the coin itself does not stand for anything; it is what one does with what is entrusted to them that really counts. Step back and look at the story again. The master leaves for a while, entrusting his servants to carry on his work. Then he returns and each one has to give an account of what they had done. Do you see the deeper message of the story now? Jesus is the Master; He has gone back to heaven entrusting us with the Good News and building His kingdom here on earth. Remember the Great Commission – go make disciples of all nations. Each of us will be meeting Him sooner or

later, either in His Second Coming or our leaving this world. Either way, like the three servants, we will have to give an account of how we used the talents and abilities that God gave us. How did we live our lives? How will you answer? Will you be able to respond as the first two servants or will you be making excuses like the one talent servant?

People live their life as a talent. Some bury their talent; they are bitter and filled with regret. Others invest their time and energy in such a way as to get the greatest return; they live life to the fullest. When they come to the end of their life as we know it, these individuals have few regrets. The world will end some day and God will require a final reckoning from each of us, whether we like it or not.

Picture in your mind a tall ladder leaning against a wall. Now think about your life as a process of climbing that ladder. Wouldn't it be a tragedy to get to the top of the ladder and find out that you placed it against the wrong wall? One life to live and you missed it.

The question that I want us to seriously consider this morning is – am I giving my best to the Lord? I don't mean just showing up for church occasionally. I mean devoting your life each and every day in service to the Lord; making the best use of your time and resources, every opportunity and every gift God gives you. Each morning I pray that I might do my best for the Lord that day; however, there are days when I feel that I have not done everything I could for Him. You may feel the same way sometimes. But the point is that we must try; make a true effort to give our all to the Lord. Because someday each of us will be standing before the Lord and will have to give an account of how we lived like these three servants did. How will we respond? When our time comes, may we all hear those wonderful words: "Well done my good and faithful servant!" Amen