“Don’t waste your life”

The Parable of the Talents – Matthew 25:14-30

9.30a.m. Sunday 26 November, 2017

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the Laidley Baptist Church (Qld).

Read the Parable of the Talents - Matthew 25:14-30

Let’s pray …

Gracious Heavenly Father, We have come to worship you as our God today. You are worthy of our adoration, praise and worship through Jesus’ sacrifice. Show us new and practical things from your Word. May we have an aha moment this morning. Challenge us in our hearts to be your people fully devoted to you. May that be illustrated through our actions and our words on your behalf as we respond. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

So what is a talent?

When used as a measure of money, it refers to a talent-weight of gold or of silver. The gold talent is reported as weighing roughly the same as a person, and so perhaps 50 kg (110 lb avoirdupois). Some authorities say that the talent typically weighed about 33 kg (75 lb) varying from 20 to 40 kg.

Wikipedia reports that a Greek, or Attic talent, was 26 kilograms (57 lb), a Roman talent was 32.3 kilograms (71 lb), an Egyptian talent was 27 kilograms (60 lb), and a Babylonian talent was 30.3 kilograms (67 lb). Ancient Israel, and other Levantine countries,
adopted the Babylonian talent, but later revised the mass. The heavy common talent, used in New Testament times, was 58.9 kilograms (130 lb).

What is the context of this passage in the Book of Matthew?

The point of this Parable (the 5th in the Olivet Discourse) is to reemphasize the necessity to keep on laboring/working while watching and waiting for the Master’s return. The distinction is not between different types of believers, but between believers and unbelievers. **Believers** will keep on laboring while watching for the Lord’s return (that’s what you & I are to do in the Church). But the **unbeliever** cannot labour in the work of the Lord and therefore will have nothing to show at the time of the Lord’s return. He is declared the wicked on in this Parable. He ends up in the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth – the descriptive phrases of the Lake of Fire.

30  *And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’*

Traditionally, the parable of the talents has been seen as an exhortation to Jesus’ disciples to use their God-given gifts in the service of God, and to take risks for the sake of the Kingdom of God. These gifts have been seen to include personal abilities ("talents" in the everyday sense), as well as personal wealth.

It’s always an interesting and sometimes confusing or controversial topic - **How should Christians think about work, success, and wealth?**

Well, the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30 provides a helpful framework for thinking about them. I have five quick lessons the Parable of the Talents can teach us about work, success, and wealth:

1. **First, this parable teaches us that success is a product of our work.**

In the book of Genesis we see that God placed Adam in the garden to work it and take care of it. We were made to work. As Christians we have a mission that our Lord expects us to accomplish in the here and now.

Far too many Christians today see their salvation as simply a “bus ticket to heaven.” They believe it doesn’t matter what they do while they “wait for the bus.” The Parable
of the Talents teaches us what we are supposed to do while we await the return of our King. We are to work!

We are to work, using our talents to glorify God, serve the common good, and further God’s kingdom. Biblical success is working diligently in the here and now using all the talents God has given us to produce the return expected by the Master.

**Challenging question - Did you use all your talents to glorify God this week?**

2. **The Parable of the Talents teaches that God always gives us everything we need to do what he has called us to do.**

Have you ever wondered what a talent is worth in today’s dollars? It is hard to know for sure, yet whatever its exact value, in the New Testament a talent indicates a large sum of money, maybe even as much as a million dollars in today’s currency. Based on the gold price this morning, I calculated that a 60kg gold talent would be worth a tick under 2.5 million dollars!!

We are tempted to feel sorry for the servant who received only one talent, but in reality he received as much as a 2.5 million dollars from the master and buried it in his back yard. He was given more than enough to meet the master’s expectations.

Just as the master expected his servants to do more than passively preserve what has been entrusted to them, so God expects us to generate a return by using our talents towards productive ends. The servants were given enough to produce more – it is the same with the gifts God has given us. The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10:

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

We seldom associate this verse with our work, but we should. We are not only given more than enough, He has also prepared the work for us in advance. It’s all laid out for us. What more do we need? Everything we need AND God’s calling for us!!

3. **The Parable of the Talents teaches that we are not all created equal.**
The most overlooked part of this parable is the second half of verse 15: the master gives to each servant talents, “...each according to his ability.” The master understood that the one-talent servant was not capable of producing as much as the five-talent servant.

We want to protest this as unfair. Yet we know this is true from our own experience. Diversity is woven into the fabric of creation. We are all different and gifted differently by God. He knows how and what and how much to give to each person.

But even though we’re not created equal in regard to the talents we’re given, there is equality found in the Parable of the Talents. It comes from the fact that it takes just as much work for the five-talent servant to produce five more talents as it does the two-talent servant to produce two more talents.

This is why the reward given by the master is the same. The master measures success by degrees of effort, as should we.

As a parent we used to give our kids gold stars on their jobs chart at home on the fridge. Mostly it was given for their effort – they were rewarded even if didn’t always work out, but the reward (the gold star – which led to pocket money) was based on their efforts.

The master measures success by degrees of effort, as should we.

4. The Parable of the Talents teaches that we work for the Master, not our own selfish purposes.

The money that is given to the servants is not their own. The money they earn with the capital is not theirs to keep. The servants are only stewards of the master’s investment, and it is the quality of their stewardship that the master seeks to measure.

We should maximize the use of our talents not for our own selfish purposes, but to honour God. We know that we work in a fallen world. Because of the curse of sin, our work will be difficult. But we should feel satisfaction and joy from doing our best with what God has given us in the place where his providence puts us, seeking to succeed in order to honour him.

I find this verse from 1 Corinthians 6 helpful as I understand this principle – “We are not our own we have been bought with a price.”
5. The Parable of the Talents shows that we will be held accountable.

The Parable of the Talents is not about salvation or works righteousness, but about how we use our work to fulfill our earthly callings. It is about a whole-of-life stewardship, or “Stewardship with a capital ‘S’.”

The unfaithful steward in this parable didn’t so much waste the master’s money – he wasted an opportunity. As a result, he was judged wicked and lazy. We are responsible for what we do for God with what we have been given, and one day we will be held responsible.

What we hear from the Master on that day is up to us. Many will have heard the Gospel and wasted the opportunity to respond successfully to it, and to live in the blessing of being a true child of God.

*When we were just a young married couple and our children were small, 6 quarter acre blocks of land came up for sale next to us where we lived in Raceview – they only wanted between $3,000 & $6,000 for them, depending on the position. My neighbour Daryl and I spoke seriously about it, but we had families and no capital to invest. We should’ve taken the opportunity – they are now worth around $150,000!! I was speaking to Daryl the other day, and we remind ourselves every now and then about the missed opportunity to have done something about it.*

**CONCLUSION**

Just like in the Parable when the Master of the house went away, when we went overseas recently Rob & Bec McMillan agreed to look after our place. We entrusted our wealth to them. It wasn’t a bag of gold – we don’t have any. But it was our largest asset – our house. They looked after our house like it was their own and made sure everything was safe & secure. Even though there was hail and storms and heavy rain and strong wind, they kept an eye on it making sure there was no damage and no one came and broke in or burgled the house. What’s even better is that the House was still standing when we returned!! Well done, good and faithful servants Rob & Bec!

Did you read the story of the Homeless Man on ABC news feed this week? He used his last $20 to help a stranded lady whose car ran out of petrol on a busy highway. The lady
raised awareness about this homeless man online and what he had done, so that she could repay his generosity, and so far she has raised $350,000.

All he did was take an opportunity and use his talent! He used it in a positive way to build the kingdom – God’s kindness towards another human being. The Good Samaritan spirit. It’s all about taking the opportunities that God puts in front of us.

**Practical Application – Taking the opportunity**

I’d like to do something practical and fun as part of this message/passage today. I’m going to play the part of the Master and give everyone an opportunity & offer $10 to anyone today. You can’t keep it, you eventually have to return it. If you accept the $10 then have the responsibility to double it or triple it (or multiply it) by any (legal) means. Gambling it etc. is not permitted. The idea is that it will be used to put into our building fund. I will be back to ask for my money and see what you have done with it on Sunday 31 December.

What can you do with the ‘talent’ that the Master has given to you? Every talent is a gift and is used to build God’s house. How will you use your talent(s)?

Are you up for the challenge? If you are, come and see me after the service and I will give you the $10. Your name will be recorded in the Master’s Book, and I will require the $10 plus any interest or investment you’ve made from the $10 back at the end of the year.

Do you know the best part about this? You can actually have fun using your talent/gift. And you can have fun with my $10 as you creatively use it to further God’s kingdom. That’s the way it should be in the Church.

Unfortunately, some people don’t use their talent at all. Their estimation is that God is a hard, tough tyrant, so they do nothing with their talent. They might talk a lot, but never do anything constructive for the kingdom. They have heard about the wonderful salvation (they have accepted it), but they have chosen just to sit on it and bury it, and just want to hand it back when Jesus returns. ‘Look Jesus, here it is, you can have it back – I kept it nice and clean for you!’ *(Story of clean toolbox).*

But on the other side of the coin, many believers, as a result of their salvation and God’s call upon their life, and their thankfulness and excitement of receiving the gift, desire to use everything they have to serve the Master of the House. They want to be as creative
and sharp as possible to build the kingdom and to build the estate of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They want to pour out their lives as a thank offering to Him, who gave it all for us. Isn’t that the type of Church/faith/journey we should desire?

How will you use your talent? Will you bury it ... or will you build with it? It’s your decision – how you respond will be eternally important.

This week I read the story of David Cassidy who passed away this week at the age of 67 years. He was a part of the Partridge Family in the 60’s and 70’s. They were very successful and David Cassidy went on to become famous as a performer/singer/TV personality. He had several failed marriages, suffering from alcohol and other addictions later in life. As his life slipped from him this week, his daughter rushed to be with him just in time to hear his final words before he passed away. He was such a successful person in this life with his career, but his final words were ‘all those wasted years’.

I wonder if our lives will be counted as successful in God’s eyes, or will we rue all the wasted years of chasing false gods?

How will you use your life and your talents? Will you bury it ... or will you build with it? God is calling you (and every person on this planet) to a life of significance, and a life that has eternal success. That’s a life that responds to the beautiful name of our Master Jesus. What will you do with what God has already given to you as a gift?

Let’s pray ...

Thank you Father God for the talents you have graciously given to us, each for the sake of building your kingdom. Quicken us to realize your agenda as we use these gifts. Let your Holy Spirit guide us each day as we serve Jesus. Breathe within us a desire to serve the Living God with every breathe and all our energy, so that on that Day when you return we will return to you the harvest that is rightfully yours. Give us a fresh vision to see others come to you, and understand your amazing love. May each of us make ourselves available for you. Use me and the talents you have created in me for your kingdom, Lord, today and forever. Amen.

Closing Song – What a beautiful name, the name of Jesus
Matthew 25:14-30 (NIV)

14 “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. 15 To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. 16 The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. 17 So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. 18 But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

19 “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

21 “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!’

22 “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

23 “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!’

24 “Then the man who had received one bag of gold 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. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

26 “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? 27 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.

28 “‘So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. 29 For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’