

The Parable of the Talents, is an old favourite. And if you're as old as I am, you've probably heard it preached on, many, many times... And that's because it's a favourite for ministers – we love it....

And there's a reason for that... One of the most difficult tasks for any minister, of any church, is to encourage the flock, to see themselves as fellow disciples – It's to encourage the members of that church to stop having church '**done** to them' (or done for them), and to begin to **be** the church as Christ designed His church to be – to begin to be a bunch of Jesus' disciples, out on mission together – To be taking light where there is darkness; bringing peace where there is pain; speaking life where there is death; and the word of God to the world...

And we love this parable, because it urges all of us – you and I together – out on mission... But before we begin, let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
As we study your word today,
Help us to see with fresh eyes.
Help us to hear with attentive ears.
And Lord, may Your Holy Spirit tune **our** hearts
with yours,
That we would not only hear, but understand.
That we would not only understand, but we would
act...

Lord, we open ourselves today,
To all of the possibilities, of all of what you might
want to do in us.
Speak Lord – Your servants are listening.
Amen.

Righto, a man is heading off on a journey, so he calls
His servants (and they're not really servants by the way
– they're slaves)... So, He calls his slaves, and entrusts
His property to them... I suppose, because He knows
them, He knows the capabilities of each of them, and so
the amount He entrusts them with, is in accordance to
their ability....

To one slave, He gives 5 talents. To another slave, He
gives 2 talents. And to another He gives 1 talent.

Now, I want to take away the word “talent” here –
because it's not all that helpful – it confuses things a bit.
The word “talents” makes us think in terms of physical
talents (or even spiritual gifts) that we might have.

Some of you can sing; some can dance; some can cook;
some can weld; some can shear; some of you can shoot;
some of you can ride a horse; and some of you can
whistle really loud with your fingers in your mouth – I
can't do that (these are talents).

One day, a man told his pastor that he couldn't accomplish anything for God because he only had one talent. The pastor said, "Don't be discouraged, God can use it. "What is your talent, anyway?"

"My only thing that I'm really good at, is criticizing people...."

"In that case," the pastor said, "you'd better do what the servant did - BURY IT."

In Jesus' parable, a talent, is not an ability to do something – it's a unit of currency... And it's a BIG unit of currency.

One Talent of Silver, was equivalent to 6000 days wages. Alright, so let's put it into dollars terms: The current minimum Australian wage for, is \$16.87 / hour, on a 12 hour day, is close enough to \$200 (plus overtime).

Alright, so 1 Talent of Silver, equates to approximately \$1.2million....

So, the one with 5 talents, was entrusted with the equivalent of \$6Million, and the one with 2 talents, was entrusted with the equivalent of \$2.4million... And even the poor, lowly slave, who we think "Oh, the poor fellow – he was only given 1 Talent of Silver"... Well

he still had a fortune - \$1.2million, he was given to manage... Now, that's nothing to sneeze at – it was still an enormous responsibility (to manage \$1.2million of somebody else's money)....

And the master was a long time away...

The 1st slave and the 2nd slave, did something with what they were given. The Greek says ἠργάσατο (ergasato) coming from the word “ergon”, which means work... The slaves carried on the master's business – they worked with the money, or they put the money to work, and they managed to double it. And so when the master turned up, because they worked with their master's investment, the 1st had turned \$6million into \$12M, and the 2nd had turned \$2.4M into \$4.8M....

Verse 21 ..., 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

A key word in this story, is faith, or faithful... 2 of the slaves were faithful. The Greek word, πιστέ, means: *trustworthy, faithful; or in an active sense: trusting, believing*ⁱⁱ...

And you can see it shining through in the story – the first two slaves, were faithful, because they had faith in

their master. They were trustworthy, because they trusted their master. They knew their master. And they knew, that when He entrusted something of great value to them, they could have confidence, to put it to work...

But the 3rd slave was very different – the 3rd slave is described as “*wicked*” and ὀκνηρέ (oknere) – *which is one who hesitates because of weariness, sloth, fear, bashfulness, or reserve...*

He didn’t do anything with His master’s fortune – he just buried it in a hole in the ground. And he did it because he was afraid of his master, he was lazy, and well basically, he had no desire to carry on the master’s business....

Let’s bring it back to discipleship:

Jesus has been a long time coming. And when He returns, Jesus is expecting to see a return on His investment... What investment has He made?.... Once again, Jesus is talking privately to His disciples – are there any disciples here this morning???

It’s time to start owning “being a disciple of Jesus”...

Now, as a disciple of Jesus, what investment has Jesus made into you? Is there anything of value??? Well, where would we begin? The cross; Salvation;

forgiveness; love; the Holy Spirit; eternal life; life itself; The cost of His investment is enormous – it cost Him His life...

And now, I want to home in on a key word, that gets repeated in this passage, and it's something else that He's invested into you and I – “faith” or “faithfulness”...

God has given to some disciples, an enormous amount of faith... Some other disciples have a bit less... And God expects us, to use the faith that He has given us, to build faith... Did anyone here ever grow up with that old Sunday School song, “*Faith is like a muscle – use it and it will grow*”... That is so, so true...

A few years ago, a friend of mine saw me from behind in a crowd of people, and he said “It looked like you were dancing with someone – your 2 legs are completely different”... You see, I ride bicycles, and that builds the calf muscles up pretty well... But a few years ago, I broke my ankle, and it's now fused... And so the muscles in my right leg, that are supposed to work the ankle, don't get used any more. And so they just shrunk away. Muscles that get used, grow. Muscles that don't get used, shrink. And faith is exactly the same.

God has given all of us, faith – God has given each of His disciples, **enough** faith, but the trouble is, some of

us don't use it.... When you **use** faith, it grows, and then you have **more** faith to use next time...

God doesn't expect us to use faith we **don't** have. But He **does** expect us to use the faith that He **has** given us. Faith, begets faith. When you use faith, your faith grows. And also, when you share your faith – when you do the **work** of sharing your faith, faith is planted in others – to grow in them...

There is an enormous difference between the first 2 slaves, and the last one.

If we were on Sesame Street, we'd sing:
*“One of these slaves is not like the other,
One of these slaves does not belong....”*

How was he different?

Well, the first two, obviously knew their master, but the third one, had a false picture of his master.

The first two, were empowered by their master... The third one, was scared of Him.

The first two, were conscientious... The third one, was lazy...

The first two, were empowered to carry on the master's business, and they did so... The third one, had the same

opportunity to carry on the Master's business, but He didn't...

And, I want you to notice something that's very important here:

The master gave to each of his slaves, **according to his ability**. The wicked, lazy servant had plenty of ability – the master had given him something of enormous value – he was just too tentative to use it...

And that's the way many of us disciples are. God has given us plenty of ability – we're just afraid to use it. (the word "ability" by the way, comes from the Greek word "dunamos", which means "Power". From which we get our word "dynamite") God has given to each of His disciples, according to his dynamite power... Oh, if only, you and I only knew how much power we truly had...

You might **feel** powerless, but with the Holy Spirit, you're packing dynamite – you have power – you have ability... And God has given you faith, according to the ability that you have, but you just don't recognise it...

When you love God, you'll love His business, and you'll use the faith He's given you, to carry on that business...

Now, did you notice that the reward for the first 2 slaves, is exactly the same???? V21 & V23 are exactly the same: ²³ 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

Don't be afraid whether you succeed or not. Your reward is not based on productivity – it's not based on how much you do for God - nor is it based on how much you achieve for God – Your reward is based on faithfulness. The faithful, enter into the joy of their Heavenly Father.

The wicked, slothful servant, gave the fortune back – he gave what faith he had back – he gave it up – I don't want it any more... and so he was cast out into the darkness ³⁰ In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The more you use faith – the more you carry on the Master's business, the more you'll value the faith you have – the more you'll realise, just how precious it is.

But if you don't value your faith – if you are so tentative, that you bury your faith, you never share it, you get no joy out of knowing God (you're just afraid of God)... it won't be too long, until you give up your faith altogether...

Our Master wants us to carry on, His Kingdom Business, and not one of His disciples, are insignificant in that... He has given each of us an ability – He has given each of us a part to play.

One day, Sir Michael Costa, a famous orchestra conductor, was holding a rehearsal. And as the mighty chorus rang out, accompanied by scores of instruments, the piccolo player (a tiny little flute) -- thinking perhaps that his contribution would not be missed, stopped playing. Suddenly, the great leader stopped and cried out, "Where is the piccolo?"

The sound of that one small instrument was necessary for the harmony, and it wasn't there.

And you might feel insignificant, but every one of us have a part to play in God's orchestra...ⁱⁱⁱ

There's all sorts of reasons why people bury their faith, instead of working with it:

- Some of us don't know God well enough, and we're scared of Him
- Some of us are afraid of causing offence
- Maybe some of us have no idea just how valuable the Gospel is, and so we haven't been sharing it.
- Maybe some of us don't care if unbelievers perish.

- Maybe some of us have been told so often, that we're useless, and we've begun to believe it.
- Maybe some of us have been hurt, and we've been left feeling broken and too tentative to share faith.
- And maybe some of us are just plain lazy

If you've buried your faith (for whatever reason), get out there dig it up, dust it off, and put it to work for the building of God's Kingdom. Be faithful with the enormous investment that God has put into your life.

And be ready to hear the words:

23 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

Next week, we're taking a break from Matthew, and I'm going to share with you 5 practices that will help you to invest in God's Kingdom.

Questions:

ⁱ www.holwick.com

ⁱⁱ Michel, O., 1986. πίστις L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, & H. Bietenhard, eds. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Adapted from www.holwick.com