

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

In his book *A Call to Excellence*, Gary Inrig writes about Bertoldo de Giovanni a name even the most enthusiastic lover of art is unlikely to recognize. He was the pupil of Donatello, the greatest sculptor of his time, and he was the teacher of Michelangelo, the greatest sculptor of all time. Michelangelo was only 14 years old when he came to Bertoldo, but it was already obvious that he was enormously gifted. Bertoldo was wise enough to realize that gifted people are often tempted to coast rather than to grow, and therefore he kept trying to pressure his young prodigy to work seriously at his art.

One day he came into the studio to find Michelangelo toying with a piece of sculpture far beneath his abilities. Bertoldo grabbed a hammer, stomped across the room, and smashed the work into tiny pieces, shouting this unforgettable message, "Michelangelo, talent is cheap; dedication is costly!"

The parable we read highlights the fact that we are each given according to our abilities but what does that mean? What ability? Are we given according to our ability to spend? According to our ability to perform? Or are we given according to our desire and ability to serve?

We all know who the five-talent people are, those who are richly blessed by God and who multiply what they are given to magnify the Kingdom of God. These are the saints, people such as Michelangelo, Augustine, Mother Theresa, maybe even Martin Luther King Jr. and Billy Graham. They are people with great faith, Abraham, David, Ruth, Esther, even Jesus was a five-talent man.

Most of us though are the two and one-talent people. We are the average or maybe the slightly above average, but we are the ones who struggle with wondering what to do with what we are given.

Although abilities are not distributed equally, each of us carries the equal responsibility of using our abilities appropriately. God's desire is for us to prosper, we do this by living according to our abilities – our talents. Living according to the blessings God provides.

What is a Talent that Jesus refers to anyway? Apparently, a Talent is worth approximately ten to twenty years wages for the average laborer in New Testament times. The differences between the two-talent and one-talent persons are not subtle. God is asking big things of us but he also knows what our capabilities. When we read scripture, we read and learn what God's expectations are for us. As Christians we know what God wants, we know how we should live our lives if we are familiar with the stories Jesus tells.

In this parable, the master or King is planning a trip and entrusts his belongings to his servants. He didn't dictate to them what to do, he trusts his servants to act according to what they knew about him. In the same way, God gives us freedom to choose how to respond to his gifts and what he has entrusted to us. Free will – we can respond or not, we are free, but God knows how we are likely to act.

Now, the person given two talents might wonder what they can do with what they have been given. They may be grateful to get two and not five or not one – that person may feel their allotment might be mediocre but took what was given and used it. When the master returned the two-talent person had something to offer that increased the master's wealth. We are not asked to double our talents, we are not asked to do more than we are able. God does not expect miracles from us – he expects what he knows our capabilities to be. This parable is not a command it is an example.

The five-talent and two-talent people of this world exhibit faith – even though this was unequal distribution, each trusted God's estimation of their abilities and neither underestimated God's investment in them. Each

provided something in return for that trust that furthered the Master's wealth – God's kingdom on earth. [read verse 23] Each received their reward.

But, what of that one-talent person? [read v 24 & 25] In this parable Jesus tells us that person knew the master to be a "demanding man" and was afraid to take a chance with what was entrusted to them. It's a relationship thing first and foremost, the one-talent person thought his master was tough and unfair, the relationship had broken-down, there was no trust. Because there was no trust there was fear and self-preservation, this person was interested in protecting and sheltering, not sharing. I wonder if this person was resentful of what he was given, "Why do I have to take care of something that is not mine, why should I worry about the master's wealth" – better to have nothing than have to put that one-talent to work

Maybe the one-talent person lacked the faith required to put his resources to work for the master. "I don't have much, what can I do?" Maybe the one-talent person harbored some resentment because his master invested so little in him. This person showed a lack of faith and dedication. Remember – talent is cheap, dedication is costly, was this too costly an effort for the one-talent person? This person was more concerned with their self-interests and refused to join their interest with that of the Master. [read v. 27] The master rebukes the servant saying you should have put that talent to work.

What does this say about us? What are we doing with the 'talent' God, our master, gives us? Are we afraid to do anything because we don't have much? Do we see our master as tough and therefore afraid to take a chance? Do we fail to see how much we are needed? Are we silent when we should speak, and have we become complacent in our routines? Are we complacent with the way things are in Church and fail to see what needs to be done to advance the Kingdom of God on earth?

The one-talent man plays the victim, "you are a harsh master I was afraid, so I hid what you gave me." Do we say to God – I am afraid to shine my light – I didn't think I could measure up, so I did nothing? What excuses do we tell ourselves when we refuse opportunities to serve?

Here's the lesson for us – God knows us and knows what we can do. God knows our challenges and our opportunities and never asks for more than we can handle. So, let us be careful with our estimation of what God has invested in each of us, God knows where he has left his money. Don't underestimate God's investment in you.

We know we cannot earn or purchase our way to the kingdom, neither can we sit and wait for God's kingdom to find us. In 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 Paul writes a challenge to the people of Corinth "Remember this: The person who plants a little will have a small harvest but the person who plants a lot will have a big harvest. Each of you should give as you have decided in your heart to give." This is where you will find your joy and purpose. Doing nothing will, when you are aware of your master's will, result in emptiness, pain, and darkness.

I have to say that it distresses me greatly when I hear about people who would rather leave a church if they feel not enough is being done FOR them, if the programs that they want are not there FOR THEM they would rather leave than try to create a program that works – people would rather leave a Church than work for GOD within the Church.

Charlotte Bronte wrote "Better to try all things and find all empty than to try nothing and leave your life a blank" In giving back to God according to our abilities, God knows we do not all have equal abilities and are not all capable of doing the same things. God knows we all can do something and that is what his will is for us – do something! Our reward will be the same as the five and two-talent servants, how wonderful to hear our Master say "Well done good and faithful servant."

