

## HOW AMBITIOUS ARE YOU?

Matthew 25:14-30

Ambitious is a loaded word. When we speak of an acquaintance as being ambitious we are suggesting that he or she may be self-centered and ruthless. Our Lord rebuked the ambition of His disciples when they were striving for pre-eminence and greatness.

Some people have the idea that Christianity frowns upon ambition. But it does not. Christianity recognizes and commends the person who under the restriction of duty accepts a smaller sphere than he might choose, but it also gives its blessing to rightly motivated and directed ambition.

Christ, the Master of the art of living, was perfectly aware that some of the worst evils were caused by ambitious persons. He also knew that to ambition and to aspiration must be credited the advances of human progress. By ambition angels fell, but through ambition men have risen.

Christ's parable of the talents illustrates the place of ambition in the right sort of life. To the people who first heard the parable, "talent" meant a sum of money, about nine hundred and fifty dollars, but now the word is used to indicate ability of all kinds. It applies to the various things which God has given us. It applies to the ability to preach, to teach, to sing, or to do personal work for Christ.

Our Lord said, "The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country." How far was it? The text suggests that it was far enough that it would take him some time to go and return. Before this man, whom Christ pictured, left for another country, he called three of his servants together and gave to each one of more talents. Since both the servants and the talents belonged to him, he was the only one to decide how the division should be made. The first servant received five talents, the second received two, and the third received one talent. The master justified his unequal distribution on the ground that the servants were not equally capable. He gave "to every man according to his ability." The talents were not given to be used for the personal gain of the servants, but as stock in trade for the enrichment of their owner. After distributing the talents, the owner took his journey, leaving all responsibility for their use and increase to the individual servants.

Likewise God has given one or more talents to every person. All of us are endowed, although not equally. There is a statement in the Declaration of Independence to the effect that "All men are born free and equal." The only trouble with that statement is that it is not true. It never was true, and it never will be true. Men are equal in the sense that all have certain inalienable rights, but all men are not equally endowed. If you will study the members of one family, you will find that there is a wide difference between their abilities and capacities. Some have five talents, some have two, and others have one; but all have something. That is the important thing. Naturally, all of us would like to have many talents, occupy positions of importance, and have set for us a task that would require real ability for its accomplishment. It is always an element of strength in any man if he knows that he has one or more talents.

How foolish it is for anyone to envy another! This master gave to his servants according to the ability of each. Each had a natural capacity, a natural aptitude for certain things, and this wise master knew with what each could be trusted. He did not give the man of but small capacity five talents; he gave him only one. But the man who was equal to the task was given five talents to invest in the interest of his master.

This parable certainly means that, so far as we who are Christians are concerned, all of us have some divine endowment, some trust committed to our care, some particular piece

of service which we are commissioned to render, some duty we are required to perform. None of us are called to inactivity, to mere idleness, or to a life of stagnation and ease. Each of us is called to a life of strenuous endeavor for Christ. We are required to be about our Master's business.

The first servant in the parable was aware that his talents and the opportunity to use them came from his master. Conscious of the greatness of the trust, he went to work at once to do his best for the enrichment of his master while he was away. He was determined to do his best to be worthy of the confidence of his master in him. He proved to be a shrewd investor. He invested his five talents so wisely that he realized a profit of one hundred per cent on the transaction. When his master returned and called for an accounting, this servant brought the ten talents with a feeling of satisfaction that he had done his best for the Master. He had worked, to be sure, but it was his master who had provided him with the means which enabled him to work. Because he had done well his master said, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things."

The second servant, entrusted with two talents, lacked the ability and skill of his colleague, but was honest and industrious. By faithful attention to detail and hard work he doubled his capital, thereby proving that by the use of any gift it can be increased. It is not primarily a question of what one has received, but it is a matter of what use has been made of that which has been received. When the two-talented man reported an increase of one hundred per cent his master said, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things."

The third servant presented the talent which he had received, but he did not have any gains to report. He had simply looked after what he had been given and gave it back exactly as he had received it. He had failed to use what had been given to him. He blamed somebody else for his failure to report any gain. He was bold enough to declare to his master, "I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed."

It is to be observed that this man referred to the one talent, which he had received, as "thy talent." He did not say, as did the others, "which thou deliveredst unto me." He never considered it a sacred trust in the sense that they did. He did wrong in misjudging his master. Had he really have thought that his master was a hard man, he should have seen to it that his money was put to work. He simply did not use what he had. He not only had all that he was capable of handling, but more than he did handle or use. So, his talent was taken from him and given to the man with ten talents because the latter would put it to good use.

What was the matter with the one-talent man? He was lacking in ambition. He did not realize that he needed to be faithful in the use of his talent. He proved that he was not deserving and worthy of the opportunity which was given to him.

Three Greek words were used to describe the one-talent man. The first is poneros, meaning bad or evil. It comes from the verb poneo, meaning to work, and is here translated wicked. Evidently hatred of work is a very old habit. Basically this man was downright lazy. Being allergic to work, he did not use his talent, but buried it. The second adjective is okneros, which comes from the verb okueo, meaning to hesitate. It is translated slothful. It may be freely translated "pokey." In business he was too late. The third adjective is achreios, which comes from the verb achreio, meaning to be useless. It may be translated "of no account" or "unprofitable." So, this one-talent man was lazy, pokey and useless.

Consequently, the one-talent man became the no-talent man. Such need not be the case with us if we are ambitious. A man may begin with one talent and gain others. That is the law of life. It is the law of nature that if you do not use your arms it will not be long until you cannot use them. So it is with the mind, atrophy follows failure to use. The fish in the river within Mammoth Cave cannot see; in fact, they no longer have eyes. The places where the eyeballs used to be are there and glare at you as reminders of the time when the fish were out in the light where they could see. Unused talent will be taken from you. "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." That is the law of nature and the law of God.

Since God has invested something in each of us, He rightfully expects some return on His investment. You may think that since you have but one talent or just a little ability it does not matter whether you bury it or use it. You may think that you could do wonders if you had a big task. You may say to yourself, "A person with my background, education, talents, and genius could do wonders if I just had an opportunity commensurate with my gifts. But the small job that I have just doesn't draw out the best that there is in me, and, therefore, I am not going to do anything." If that is your thinking and attitude, I would like to remind you that one is not usually asked to take another task until he has proved himself worthy of the one that he has. There are exceptions, I am confident, but as a rule, people get what they deserve in the way of opportunities for service.

How ambitious are you? Are you a soldier of the cross? Might others judge that the only order you have received from the Commander is "At ease." What retards the Lord's work most -- opposition, languid indifference or the lack of ambition on the part of professing Christians? The parable shouts its warning to the person who, because of the lack of ambition, hides or refuses to use his talent or talents. Are you any more ambitious than the man who refused to use his talent and buried it? When you say, "I do not have any talent to do anything," you really mean, "I will not do anything." Even if you cannot be a Major-General in the Lord's Army, you can at least be a faithful and useful private.