

FINDING THE JOY OF THE LORD

Matthew 25:14-30

From this story we learn the important truth that men are not equally endowed. Some have more abilities than others. Some are born with a stronger and more attractive physical body than others. Some are given better opportunities.

However, in every person God has invested some ability. So, it is not my business to compare myself with others, but rather to use what I have in the best way I can for Him. It is my business to do the best I can and not be envious of any other person. God needed you and me, so He made us.

I. The Distribution of the Talents. Matthew 25:14-15.

In this parable Jesus pictured a man committing his property to his servants prior to his leaving for another country. Concerning his distribution of the talents, three things are obvious.

1. It was a sovereign act.

This man had some servants whom he had bought. Their time, strength, and ability belonged to him. Before leaving the country, he called his servants together and distributed his talents among them. Since both the servants and the talents belonged to him, he was the only one to decide how the division should be made.

2. It was an intelligent act.

The talent was a weight of gold or silver, the actual money value of which fluctuated from time to time. Each servant received something before his master left. None was left without a gift, or a talent. To some the master gave more than to others, and he justified his unequal distribution on the ground that the servants were not equally capable--"to every man according to his several ability." He gave to each man the amount of his goods which that servant was able and willing to use. The talents did not differ in nature, but in amount--one received five; another, two; and the other, one.

3. It was a purposeful act.

The talents were not given to be used for the personal gain of the servants, but as stock in trade for the enrichment of the master, their owner. Each was expected to use his talents and to increase them, no matter how many or how few. After distributing the talents, the owner took his journey, leaving all responsibility to the individual servants.

In like manner, God has given one or more talents to every person. To some he has given a plurality of talents, but to every rational being, not less than one. God has given to every man his work and also some capital for the doing of that work. Every person has the capacity to render some service without which the world must be the poorer.

Our talents vary greatly. No two of us are alike. From birth, some are more gifted than others. They are born with sound bodies, while

others are born with inherited tendencies toward disease. Some are born with fine mental endowments, while others are only mediocre or below par. Some are born with the moral momentum of a godly ancestry flowing in their veins, while others are hampered by an ancestry that was weakened and poisoned by unclean living. We differ also in our opportunities for the development of our talents. Some are born into an atmosphere of culture where they are surrounded by the best educational advantages from their very infancy. From their homes they go to attend the best educational institutions of the country. But others are born into an atmosphere of ignorance. From babyhood, they are compelled to look out from the cob-webbed, smoke-begrimed windows of the handicapped. Early they are forced to matriculate in the "university of hard knocks, whose colors are black and blue."

Then we differ vastly in our opportunities for using our talents. There are some who are called to work in fields that are difficult. Others work in fields that are much easier. One makes a report that fills you by the fullness of his success. Another follows him with a report that smacks of almost utter failure. Yet one knows that the meager report shows a greater earnestness, a greater faith, a greater loyalty, and much more hard work than the one that seemed so much more victorious.

Since these talents came to the servants as a gift, or gifts, none of the servants was deserving of honor above another. All that each had was presented to him by his master. So, it is not the wealth of our endowment that entitles us to honor, but rather the use we make of that endowment. Therefore, as these men left the presence of their master, each with his talent, one was as much entitled to honor as either of the others.

We sometimes speak of "talented" people, but we are all talented. No one is born into this world without a talent. Of course, there are those who are more highly endowed than others. As Abraham Lincoln was passing along, he heard a bystander say, "Isn't Lincoln a common-looking fellow?" Lincoln replied, "Evidently the Almighty must like us common-looking fellows, or he would not have made so many of us." Truly, the Lord loves the common people, the family of the one talent, which is the largest family in the world. Perhaps most of us would acknowledge that we belong to it. God has given each of us all that we can handle wisely, and he depends on us to use what he has given us.

II. The Diligence of the Servants. Matthew 25:16-18.

1. The Faithful Servants (Verses 16-17).

Two of the servants were aware that their talents as well as the ability and the opportunity to use them, came from their master. They revealed their recognition of his just ownership by being diligent with what he had left to them during his absence. Conscious of the greatness of the trust, each went to work at once to do his best for the enrichment of his master while he was absent from them. They used their talents, not for their own gain, but for his enrichment.

The five-talented man put his talents to use immediately and gained five more. The two-talented man put his talents to use immediately

and gained two more. Thus each doubled his capital. This proves conclusively that God's gifts can be increased. The use, or exercise, of any gift increases it. It is not primarily a question as to what we have received, but as to what use we have made of what we have received. How are you using the talents which the Lord has given you?

The five-talented man did not lose any time, but eagerly and wholeheartedly went to work at once to do his best for his master. He was determined to do his best to be worthy of his master's confidence in him. By doing his best, he made a hundred per cent increase. The two-talented man was equally industrious and, in proportion, equally successful, for he also doubled his capital.

2. The Unfaithful Servant (verse 18).

Perhaps the one-talented man felt slighted because he received only one talent. He evidently considered himself the equal of either of the others. Like most weak men, he was likely conceited and had a keen sense of his rights. His spirit was bitter and rebellious. Having such an opinion of himself, he therefore revolted against what must have seemed to him an act of sore injustice. So, in his bitterness, he went and hid his talent in the earth, which was only typical of many people who are disappointed with their lot in life.

Life is full of inequalities. It is exceedingly difficult for many to accept their places with satisfaction; and it always makes the case far more difficult when people compare their lot, not with that of those who are less fortunate, but with that of those who are more fortunate than themselves.

III. The Decision of the Lord. Matthew 25:19-30.

"After a long time, the lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them." The two faithful servants came with a hundred per cent profit and with a feeling of satisfaction that they had done their best for the master. The first servant had gained five more talents. He brought them and attributed his gains to the master's original gifts. He had worked, but it was his master who had provided him with the means which enabled him to work. The second man came with a hundred per cent profit and with a similar attitude. These men had done their best for their master. The third servant came to render his account. He had been unfaithful, so he brought back only that which had been given to him. Instead of coming with humility and self-abasement, confessing his sinful negligence, he made some false excuses and tried to shift the blame from himself upon his master.

Things of which he might have been afraid:

1. The fact that he could not make as big a showing as the others. He only had one talent while they had five and two. He knew he could not be the most outstanding, so he would not be anything. No doubt he told himself and others what wonderful things he would do if only he had more talents. Perhaps you have dreamed about what you would do if you had Rockefeller's wealth--build churches, hospitals, schools, help the poor, etc.

"It's not what you'd do with a million
If riches should be your lot;
But what are you doing today
With the dollar and a quarter you've got?"

Rockefeller did have millions, but there was a time when he made only \$4.50 a week and he gave a tithe of that.

2. The possibility of failure.

He said, "I knew thee that thou art a hard man," and if he failed he felt that he would be condemned severely.

3. Work.

He was called a "slothful" servant. A lot of us like to sing the old Negro spiritual, "I want to go to heaven, sitting down." Read the lives of great people and you find they had one thing in common-- they worked hard. False pride, lack of faith and laziness can so paralyze your life that you wither away into nothing.

As to the faithful servants, they rendered their accounts with joy and received the commendation of their master for their work. He expressed his approval of them in the words, "Well done!" That was an emphatic expression of approval. He believed in encouraging faithfulness, and so does our Lord. Nothing helps people along the high road of life and the up-hill road to heaven like encouragement.

Their master did not mention their cleverness, their brilliance, or their success; but he commended them for their faithfulness. Our Lord will not reward us for our cleverness, brilliance, or success, but for our faithfulness to Him. He is simply asking us to do our best for Him with what He has entrusted to us. While we may not be able to do great things in the eyes of men, we certainly can do our best for our Lord; and He will certainly deal with the results of our efforts in the light of our ability, opportunity, and diligence. Let us do our very best with what we have in the way of ability and opportunities. If we will only do so, we shall discover that both of them will be increased.

"Enter thou into the joy of thy lord." That is one of the most thrilling and beautiful statements in the Bible. That is what we all want -- to enter into the joy of the Lord.