

Don't Bury It in the Ground (the Parable of the Talents)

Matthew 25:14-30 (New American Standard Bible)

¹⁴ “For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The one who had received the five talents immediately went and did business with them, and earned five more talents. ¹⁷ In the same way the one who had received the two talents earned two more. ¹⁸ But he who received the one talent went away and dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ “Now after a long time the master of those slaves *came and *settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have earned five more talents.’ ²¹ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter the joy of your master.’

²² “Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, ‘Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have earned two more talents.’ ²³ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter the joy of your master.’

²⁴ “Now the one who had received the one talent also came up and said, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed. ²⁵ And I was afraid, so I went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you still have what is yours.’

²⁶ “But his master answered and said to him, ‘You worthless, lazy slave! Did you know that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. ²⁸ Therefore: take the talent away from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.’

²⁹ “For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. ³⁰ And throw the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Introduction

Reality Check

I love being a pastor. For an average pastor, being a shepherd means to do almost anything in the Church as the need arises. Praying, preaching, teaching the Word of God, studying, planning, attending the meetings, visitations, leading services and Bible studies,

doing funerals, weddings, baptisms, sometimes pushing the mop, changing the light bulbs... even cleaning the toilet.

Don't get me wrong, I am not complaining. Actually, I don't mind doing them at all. It's just that I have to fight the pressure for being good at everything I do: good with children, with youth and adults, with single parents, with shut-ins and the dying and even with the strangers. You would say to me, "*Pastor, we don't expect that from you. After all, you can't be good at everything.*" I know, and thanks for your kindness. But, that's how I feel from time to time. More often than not, I wish to be a superman, although I know I will never be. I need help from somebody bigger than I. I could use something bigger than my own natural talents and abilities. That's where God comes in. He equips me with a certain talent or gift to do His work efficiently and effectively.

In my early years of ministry, I noticed one thing that stood out above all things I had done. This one thing bore a much more tangible fruit than all other ministries I did. It was funeral services. Not that my eulogies or liturgies were excellent, but that people somehow were touched by a genuine compassion and empathy from me. Since then, I discovered that compassion/mercy is my talent from God. Whenever I used it, it comforted people, strengthened them and even brought non-believers to Christ.

Content

Now, the Bible says that God gives a unique gift to every believer, not just to a few individuals. He bestows various types of gifts to all of His children. Were they all utilized well and practiced on a regular basis by God's children, it would edify the Church and encourage and strengthen God's people.

Sadly, however, too many of us are unaware of the existence and availability of God's gifts for them. Even though we know what God has bestowed on us, some of us end up burying their gifts in the ground, never using them for God's church and God's people. When this happens, God's church suffers. We would miss the full demonstration of God's power in ministries; the ministry impacts would get diminished.

That is the topic we are going to think about this morning: Use God-given talents. Never bury them in the ground.

Definition of God-given gifts (different from spiritual **fruits** such as love, joy, peace,... Galatians 5:22-23)

Definition: Gift in the Bible is a God's special *blessing* bestowed on the child of God. It is a *ministry tool* for God's people. It is God-willed, not human-generated. It is given to *all God's children*, not just to a few chosen ones. It is *for God's glory*, and *for the common good* of the Church, yet *never for selfish gains*. Let me unpack them for you.

Three characteristics of God-given gifts in today's text:

In today's text, Jesus identifies three characteristics of God's gifts:

1. *God's gift is for every believer:* All three servants received their shares of talents. Right? In the same way, in God's household, God gives every believer a gift according to one's own ability and personality [v. 14]. Be assured that God wouldn't give you something beyond your ability. Knowing exactly how much you can handle in terms of faith and personal character, God grants your gift accordingly. Furthermore, none of the gifts is any "better" or more important than the others. Each gift is unique. E.g. Unique members of our body (eyes, nose, hands, feet, internal organs) carry out unique functions.
2. *It is for God and for the people of God, not for selfish gains:* Remember, for each servant, the seed money was given to do something with it for the master, not for themselves. Same thing with God's gifts. They are never for yourselves, but for God and for the people of God. Ask this question: *Why has God given me a spiritual gift?* It is for His glory. It is for His Kingdom. It is given to you so that when you use the gifts, it benefits others and the Church. It is never for your own personal gains.
3. *Use it or lose it:* Think of the master's verdict on each servant: the servant with ten talents would get even more and the servant with the one talent would lose everything: *"For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away"* [v. 29]. The lesson is this: if you use your talent more, you will have more. If you don't use it, you lose even whatever is left. Any musician or athlete would testify to that: the importance of regular practice. E.g. My daily reading of Scripture in Greek kept my biblical language up even after 30 years of graduation, but not Hebrew. God wants us to keep using the gifts instead of burying them in the ground. In the end, He will reward us according to what we have done with our gifts. Those who used them well will be rewarded. Those who buried their talents in the ground and never used them for God's glory will regret what they haven't done.

Lesson from the lazy servant

The problem of the evil and lazy servant was not that he lost the money through business failure. Rather, the real trouble was that he *did nothing* with it [v. 25]. His problem was stemmed from two things: *misunderstanding* and *timidity*. His misunderstanding of the master and his timidity that kept him from trying.

- *Misunderstanding*: His real mistake was that he put his own judgment over the master's command. He misunderstood that his master was a hard man [v. 24]. He thought the master would take all the fruit with no seed sown by his own hand. He thought his master would suck out everything from him without putting his own sweat. The servant believed it was so unfair of the master to take it all that he refused to carry out the master's order. The trouble is this: the servant forgot who he was in the first place. He forgot that he was a slave, a *bond-servant*, who was to obey the master's order no matter what, whether he liked it or not.

The lesson is this: Never misunderstand who our God is. He is not harsh. He is not demanding. Rather, He is the kindest and the most generous of all. He will be generous with the outcome of your investment, whatever it may be, even the loss. He will be with you and give you wisdom and strength to bear fruits when you use your gift. He will bless and commend you for the use of your talents. That leads us to the second point.

- *Timidity*: the servant was fearful [v. 25] of his master and afraid of the failure. So, he ended up not trying at all. Then, he brought upon himself the master's harsh verdict. Note here: the servant was punished not because he lost all the money after he had invested it in business. Rather, he was chastised because he did nothing with the money, which was an act of disobedience. All he did was to bury and keep it in the ground. When the master returned, he simply dug out and returned the exact same amount to the master. His master would never have chastised him even if he had tried and failed. Our God never gives you the spirit of timidity, rather He gives you the spirit of power, love, and discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). Therefore, be bold, be creative, and never be afraid to put God's given talent into use for God's people.

Closing

There are more than 20 gifts and offices of God listed in the Bible including, but not limited to (refer to insert): Prophesying, Serving, Teaching, Encouragement, Giving, Leading, Mercy, Knowledge, Healing, Miraculous powers, Distinguishing between spirits, Tongues, Interpretation of tongues, and etc.

Throughout this week, pray about the gifts God has given you (refer to insert).

- What are they? Consider the areas where you see visible and tangible fruits that help the Church and God's children.
- Have you been using them? If not, start using them right away.

- If you can't think of one, pray to God to reveal that to you. Talk with me, and I can help you as well as pastor. Remember, God has given at least one talent to each of you and He wants you to use it for His glory. Don't bury God's gift in the ground.

Amen.

Spiritual Gifts (insert)

Gifts (Romans 12:6-8)

- Prophecy
- Serving (ex: music/praise, trustees, committees, hospitality)
- Teaching (ex: Sunday School, youth, etc.)
- Exhortation / encouragement (ex: words/acts of kindness)
- Giving
- Leading (ex: administration)
- Mercy (ex: nurture, listening, counseling)

9 Gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:8-10)

- The word of wisdom
- The word of knowledge
- Faith
- Healing
- Working of miracles
- Prophecy
- Discerning / distinguishing between spirits
- Speaking / praying in tongues
- Interpretation of tongues