

# The Parable of the Talents



The Parable of the Talents is one of the best known of Jesus' parables. It appeals to our sense of responsibility and fits in with what we hold to be central in life: showing initiative, using our abilities and 'maximising our potential' to be productive citizens.

This parable not about our work ethic, but the true nature of Christian discipleship!

- \* It reminds us of the superabundance of God's grace.
- \* It summons us to take risks in preaching the Gospel as they await God's future.
- \* And it warns them of the consequences of cautious and resentful religion.

Superabundance of God's gift and Grace: The first thing to note is the enormous sum of money given to each worker. Talent was a measurement of weight. One 'talent' was worth more than 20 years' wages of a laborer. One man was given the equivalent of 100 years' wages, another 40, the third 20. The boss is extravagant beyond measure in what he gives to each man.

Thus, this parable of discipleship begins with the superabundance of God's grace. Whilst there is a great diversity of gifts in the church, everybody, including the third servant, receives more than they could possibly have imagined.

The second thing to note is that God's magnanimous gift comes with great responsibility. With Great Power there is Great Responsibility. There is no grace or gift without a demand to act boldly in passing on the Good News. The parable of the talents shows us that -- like the first and second servants who took risks and made more-- those who have received the gift of extravagant grace are called to take risks in promoting the Gospel.

The third thing to note is that the parable is a warning against **religion that is cautious and resentful**. This becomes clear with the unexpectedly harsh treatment of the third servant. To us he is not so irresponsible. He does not lose the money or waste it on riotous living. He is not careless but, as the law requires, buries the valuable talent in order to guard against theft. He is a good, sensible, religious person! God wants us to use his gifts, not bury them.

A faith that 'plays it safe' is resentful of God's grace to all. This comes out in a curious exchange between him and the Master in which the servant accuses the Master as being harsh and unscrupulous in dealing



with people. Certainly, the Master expects a great deal of his servants. But harsh and unscrupulous?

The dilemma is solved if we see that the Master's repetition of the servant's complaint is ironic. He ridicules the man's lame excuse for inaction in the form of a question. He does not justify himself but says, in effect, 'Yeah, right! If you really thought that I was harsh and unscrupulous, why did you not do the decent thing?'

In view of the Master's extraordinary generosity to him and the trust placed in him with 20 years' wages, it is inconceivable that the third servant's accusation has any foundation. He simply tries to shift the blame for his extreme caution and to justify his resentment at being asked to take risks!

The parable reminds me of the older son in the parable of the Prodigal son.. He stayed close to home, enjoyed everything that the Father had, but was angry and resentful.

The third servant is condemned because he is afraid of making mistakes in God's service. As Eduard Schweizer puts it: 'Jesus is saying that a religion concerned only with not doing anything wrong in order that its practitioner may one day be rewarded, ignores the will of God.'

In the parable, Jesus makes it clear that this cautious, resentful man is a useless and dangerous enemy of the Gospel. Who is a cautious man? The Parable of the Cautious man: There was a very cautious man, who never laughed or cried. He never risked, he never lost. He never won or tried. And when he one day passed away, his insurance was denied. For since he never rally lived, they claimed he never died.”



Faith is about going out on limb.. The cautious faith, that never saws off a limb on which it is sitting, Never learns that unattached limbs may find strange, unaccountable ways of not falling. Let me illustrate with a short story – A man fell off a cliff and the only thing between him and his unfortunate death was a precarious tree branch from which he was hanging. He cried out “God, please help me!” God answered, “Have faith and I will protect you. Let go of the branch.” The man, stunned, cried out, “Is there anyone else up there?”

Faith always means taking risks.. I would like you to read with me.. Ecclesiastes 10:8 say, When you work in a quarry, stones might fall and crush you! When you chop wood, there is danger with each stroke of your ax! Such are the risks of life?

Pope Francis is asking the Church, the bishops to go out on a limb.. to do things they have never done before, to love the unlovable, to reach the unreachable, to

do the impossible.. Boy! Is it hard.. Absolutley! A Church that is so often pre-occupied with its own security, a church that is only worried about its own doctrine and not wanting to make mistakes has lost its nerve as a community of hope. And all you hear sometimes is resentment.

As a disciple, we've got to take risks, make mistakes for God! This parable is indeed, a case-study of Jesus' statement that 'whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it' (Matthew 16:25).