

The Parable of the Talents

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[0 : 00] So we've got the passage in front of us from Matthew chapter 25. You remember we're looking at three parables from Matthew chapter 25.

And these really all spring from a question from the disciples in Matthew chapter 24. They're asking about the end of the age, the times in which we live today. So they say to Jesus, When will these things be and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?

And chapters 24 and 25 are about just that. Jesus is looking ahead and talking about the last times, the times in which we live. So we're looking at the second parable in chapter 25 from verse 14.

Jesus says, For it will be like a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability.

Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had received two talents made two talents more.

[1 : 12] But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, Master, you delivered to me five talents. Here I have made five talents more.

His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little. I will set you over much. Enter into my joy. Enter into the joy of your master.

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, Master, you delivered to me two talents. Here I have made two talents more. His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant.

You have been faithful over a little. I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master. He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you do not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed.

[2 : 20] So I was afraid. And I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours. But his master answered him, You wicked and slothful servant.

You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed. Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers. And at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.

So take the talent from him and give it to him who has ten talents. For everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance.

But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

What a verse that is, isn't it? Verse 30. We've got two points. And our first point is Adam buries his talent. Now, first of all, we'll have to remove from our minds the common understanding of the word talent.

[3 : 30] We have talented sportsmen, don't we? Talented musicians. And I guess we have talent scouts as well, going to different football grounds, seeking out players and things like that.

And my Oxford dictionary even tells me that talent can refer to the opposite sex. But, well, we need to go back in time and place ourselves in the first century.

The Greek word, the Greek word was for a weight. The talent was a measure of weight. And it also became a unit of exchange. I guess it invaded Britain with the Roman Empire.

Probably stored it Hadrian's Wall for a good time, didn't it? But eventually it's reached Buchanan Street and it's changed from its original meaning.

It's a much more broad meaning in the Bible. Etymology we call the process, don't we? This is what Professor Don Carson says about the word. Attempts to identify the talents with spiritual gifts, the law, natural endowments, the gospel or whatever else, lead to a narrowing of the parable with which Jesus would have been uncomfortable.

[4 : 46] Perhaps he chose the talent symbolism because of its capacity for varied application. So I'd like us to have a broad view of the word.

Basically, let's not just confine the meaning talent to gifts. It's not just gifts. In the parable in front of us, it's the master's property, isn't it?

A talent then is something that we're entrusted with by God. All of us have talents. The air we breathe is a talent. The earth that we're on now is a talent, isn't it?

We'd be floating around in fresh air if we'd not got the earth. If you think about it, we're on God's turf. God is the landlord.

And verse 19 is going to return one of these days to judge how we've looked after his planet and the talents that he's given to us. Our relationships, our opportunities, the things we do at work, the skills that God gives us, the things he's entrusted us with.

[5 : 56] They're all talents. And one of these servants, he had five talents, didn't he? Yeah, so think about this. In all of God's creation, there's nobody being given more talents, think about this, than Adam.

Adam had the most talents. Why? Well, God gave him his image. And then he gave him the whole of creation to go out and inhabit and subdue.

Genesis chapter 1, verses 27 to 31. It's a beautiful picture of that process, really. The abundance of gifts that are poured out to Adam by his loving creator.

And so Adam has stewardship of the creation under God's authority. He's to look after it. I hope you're with me. I hope you're sort of following me with this.

It's like the master's gone away and left Adam in charge of his talents and in charge of the creation.

But, well, we all know Adam does things his own way, doesn't he?

[7 : 08] He does things his own way and he's just like the worthless servant in this parable. And then he has the, well, the cheat, really, to blame Eve and God in the very same breath.

He says, it was her, the woman you gave to me. Genesis chapter 3. And, well, the servant does the same. He blames God. Just have a look with me.

He almost sarcastically says at the end of verse 25, just look there. He says, here, you have what is yours. And we also, we serve ourselves, don't we?

And not God. Listen, we think we know better quite often, like Adam. Listen, I'm told that children don't take very long to learn how to sin.

Am I right? Is that right? That's what people tell me. And I do happen to remember winding up one of those old mechanical gramophones. Do you know the ones?

[8 : 08] I remember winding up an antique mechanical gramophone when I was a little child and I stood on the turntable and as I rotated, I was showing off to my sister.

So we all abuse things, don't we, in different ways. We all sin. And so what's the penalty of a whole life of wasting God's creation and doing things that don't glorify him?

Well, Adam starts to uncreate. He knew that was the penalty. It's like a slug choosing to sort of crawl into salt.

They begin to dissolve. And Adam starts to return to the dust from which God made him. God says, you are dust and to dust you shall return.

It's what we call entropy. That's the scientific word. We're dissolving back to constituents, degrading. And friends, we all inherit that process.

[9 : 06] Just listen to what the Apostle Paul says about that. Paul says this. It's Romans chapter 5. Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.

It's the minister, isn't it? A drizzly day standing by the edge of the grave, dust to dust, ashes to ashes. And in addition, Adam, he's cursed, excluded from fellowship with God, thrown out of the garden.

Indeed, the whole of creation is cursed. And it's the same with the unfruitful servant. Just have a look there at the beginning of verse 30. It's exactly the same.

And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. And friends, that's us. That's a pattern that we inherit from Adam. We do things our way and not God's way.

We put together our own systems for living on his territory. Use the blessings that he bestows on us, not for his glory, but for our glory.

[10:14] We smother those talents. That's the general pattern of humankind. Take sex, for example. God gives us sex. It's a blessing that ought to be confined to marriage.

The two become one flesh. You remember that? Yet sadly, Glasgow, 40% of children come from single parent families. My sister was a single parent until one of my friends married her.

Usually the male leaves, doesn't he? He becomes one flesh, but then he sort of walks away from his responsibilities. The Westminster Shorter Catechism says that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Yet we take his creation, don't we? We take his blessings and we use them for ourselves to glorify us. Do you do that? The Bible says you do.

We sort of miss our end, our purpose, our *raison d'etre*, is a French word. You know, we must, I guess at times, we must look like one of these wild dogs.

[11:21] You know, you sort of sometimes see them running down the high street. They've lost their owner. They're dragging the lead behind them. I guess it sometimes must look in a spiritual situation like that.

So, that's generally the situation of humankind. We take God's blessings and we misuse God's blessings.

The Apostle Paul says, we exchange the truth for a lie and worship what is created rather than the creator. So, money, houses, work, cars, kitchen, sport, gardens, or whatever it might be, we become, we become enslaved by them, misusing our talents and they end up pulling our strings like a pseudo-god.

Just listen to this press cutting. I read this on Sunday. The late Neil McClellan sounds on the whole like a man's man, a retired merchant banker who never married.

He was usually to be found pottering about on the links at his golf club in Dunblane, Perthshire. It was here, however, that he developed a psychological disorder more commonly associated with the fragile sex.

[12:39] Mr. McClellan was addicted to shopping. Anybody here got that addiction? When he died in January, age 69, he left behind what is thought to be the biggest private collection of modern golf clubs in Britain.

More than 3,000 of them worth around 50,000 pounds. Where did he keep them? Piled into his two huge sheds in his back garden.

He had bought virtually every club and bag produced by the world's top manufacturers in the last decade, together with untold quantities of golf shoes, instruction books and videos.

All this apparently in the vain hope of improving his handicap. The creator of the universe, he visits planet earth, doesn't he?

He's crucified by Roman soldiers on the cross, he's raised from the dead, we see a glimpse of the new creation in that, and today, we live in a world, don't we, that's desperate for this message, for this gospel message of a cosmic, eternal reconciliation.

[13:50] Think, 110 billion people living in India. Just think of the scale of this, let the earth hear his voice we sing, and two sheds full of golf clubs.

Humanity, we're sort of cut loose from our purpose, which is to glorify God in all that we do. This was written by Joseph Alain, I'm not sure if I pronounce his surname properly, it's from the 17th century.

O dreadful thought that God should build such a world as this, and lay out such infinite power and wisdom and goodness thereupon and all in vain, and that man should be guilty at last of robbing and spoiling him of the glory of all.

O think of this, while you are unconverted, all the offices of the creation are in vain to you, your food nourishes you in vain, the sun holds forth its light to you in vain, your clothes warm you in vain, your beast carries you in vain.

In a word, the unwearyed labour and the continued travail of the whole of the creation as to you are in vain, the service of all the creatures that judge for you and yield forth their strength unto you, with which you should serve their maker, is all but lost labour.

[15 : 14] Hence, the whole creation ungratefulness, that's from Romans chapter 8, under the abuse of unsanctified men, who pervert all things to the service of their lusts, quite contrary to the very end of their being.

So, Joseph Helene says that outside of Christ, we're misusing the creations, the blessings of God, the talents that he gives us, we're using them for the wrong ends, the wrong purpose, and it's as if the creation wants to scream, Romans chapter 8.

And so, verse 30, the worthless servant hasn't used his talents for God, has he? Adam didn't use his talents for God, and we don't naturally use our talents for God.

And the disciples look at each other, as Jesus is explaining this parable, they look at each other and they say, well, is that us? And friends, if you're anything like me, well, you're far from perfect, and you'll know that things are far from perfect in your lives, and it's a slippery slope into verse 30.

Well, that was our first point, Adam buries God's talents, and now the good news, Jesus multiplies God's talents. The Bible presents Jesus, you'll know this, the Bible presents Jesus as the second Adam.

[16 : 41] He takes that verse 30 judgment for us, doesn't he? He becomes that person there in verse 30 on the cross.

You remember he says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The Apostles Creed, the Apostles Creed says he descended into hell, which means that he must have experienced that verdict of verse 30.

He tasted it for us. And then amazingly, Jesus Christ, he lives in us through his spirit. Listen to this, so that we begin to use the creation for its proper purpose.

The Apostle Paul says, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. Galatians chapter 2. Do you see, think about this, if Jesus lives in us through his spirit, we live in harmony with God's purpose.

Do you see? Do you see, the creator of the universe, when he lives in us, we're living in harmony with his purpose. Our lives, at last, they begin to cut with the grain of creation.

[17 : 48] And so he liberates us, doesn't he, to serve him, like these servants here. We go out into the world. Do you remember that picture in Genesis chapter 1 of Adam going out into the world?

Genesis chapter 12, Abraham going out into the world. The command to the disciples in Matthew chapter 28 to go out into the world. The gospel going out into the world in Acts, spreading to the ends of the earth.

And then that picture in Revelation of all nations being in God's kingdom, that's a pattern. And so, unlike Adam, through Christ we can do things for God's end.

Do you see? Are you with me? Sort of clearing the abnormalities out of our lives, those sheds fulls of golf clubs or whatever they might be. You know, we've become better stewards of God's creation, using our talents for the creator's purpose.

The Apostle Paul says everything was created for him. That's Jesus Christ. And so we can get the bank statements out and see how we're managing our resources, our responsibilities.

[19 : 02] We can visit the solicitor, can't we, and make sure things are in place. We can offer to the church our time and our gifts. You know, we can be sort of sensitive in the situations that God places us, you know, in the office and things like that.

And if you're anything like me, friends, you'll find it so easy to leave those sort of things to others. Perhaps, perhaps as Jesus was speaking to the disciples here, he knew that they would be tempted to do that sort of thing, to leave others to be witnesses.

But looking back, they'd probably remember verse 30, wouldn't they? And they'd remember the impact, the shock when Jesus said it to them and also to us. Jesus is, in effect, he's sort of saying, there's no passengers in my kingdom.

Here it is then. This is the Christian life. It's using the talents that God gives us for his purposes. And then, friends, one day, those words in verse 23.

Have a look at verse 23. Aren't they evocative words? Just look as we finish those words there in verse 23. His master said to him, well done, good and faithful servant.

[20 : 26] They're just a little bit like Jesus, aren't they, as he stood there in the river Jordan. And God says, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. Just like the verdict that God gave on his son.

Look at verse 23. Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little. I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.

Yes, it's just like God's verdict on Jesus. And it's ours, isn't it, in him, in Jesus Christ. That verdict is ours. Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for all the blessings that you pour out upon us as your creation.

Thank you that we have your image. Thank you that we have our lives and all that you are doing through our lives. We pray that we be particularly sensitive, Father, bearing this parable in mind. sensitive to how we can glorify you, how we can achieve your ends through your word, your spirit, and those talents that you've given to us. We pray that they'd all kiss together in our lives and people would look on and they'd see something of your son, Jesus Christ.

[21 : 46] So we pray that you go with us now and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Spirit be with us now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen.