

The Parable of Responsibility

Matt. 25:14-30

After telling a story to those who would make the mistake of assuming that His coming would be delayed, Jesus told a story to those who might make the mistake of assuming that His coming would be immediate. Either assumption would lead to error. In the first case the error was that of procrastination. Why do today what I can easily do tomorrow? In the second case the error was that of presumption. Why plan for tomorrow when it is clear that Jesus is coming today?

The faithful servant will take care of his responsibilities every day out of a love for the work and in order to be constantly ready for his master's return. The prepared bridesmaid will bring oil for tomorrow just in case the bridegroom's coming is delayed. She will be ready for any reasonable contingency.

Having made these two points in respect to readiness, Jesus continued by telling a third story. The story is usually called the Parable of the Talents but this is an unfortunate name because the word talent, in modern English has to do with one's giftedness or abilities, when at the time that the King James was translated, a talent was an amount of money. It was a great deal of money. A denarii was a coin that represented a single day's wages. A talent was 10,000 denarii. So, if we read the story in a way that reflects our contemporary economy then the man gave to the first servant, 5 million dollars, to the second, 2 million dollars, and to the third, just a million dollars. He gave these amounts to these servants according to their abilities. Their mission was to invest the money and make the most of it while the boss was gone for when he returned he would hold each of his trusted employees accountable for their results. So, I would rename our story and call it the Parable of Responsibility.

Notice first the use of the word "talent" obscures the scale of the trust of the boss for the three employees and the degree of responsibility that he entrusted to them. They were not equal and so he gave them different amounts of money to

invest. But each amount was very large, far more than they would have earned themselves in their lifetimes or would have ever had access to.

In the story the boss is God and we are the employees. The millions of dollars represents the gifts of God's grace. His grace is unexpectedly more than we could ever ask or think. The millions represent opportunity. They represent giftedness, both natural and spiritual. Some of the means of this grace could be experienced in long life, in good health, in the time and place of your birth and experience of life, in your intelligence, in your family's culture, in the time and place of your salvation, in the exposure you have had to truth and to the influence of spiritual leaders. These are all gifts that God gives and we receive them whether or not we understand right away that we are not our own for we have been bought with a price.

In the story the man who receives the 5 million and the man who receives the 2 million are each eager to go out and to make the most of their opportunity. They are engaged right away in investment strategies and business ventures so that by the time the boss returned they had each doubled the money. This would not have been an easy task. There are risks in any economy and the very nature of investment is that sometimes money is lost in spite of one's best intentions. We are familiar with professional athletes who sign huge contracts worth millions and who then become bankrupt in just a few short years, sometimes even when the money is still rolling in. So the boss really trusted these employees with a task that was beyond (in scale) any previous experience that they had encountered. Their success in doubling the investments was a tribute to the efforts they made and the persistence that they employed as well as to their aptitude for this particular opportunity.

We pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." This is not a prayer that can be prayed as one detached from the issues. You are part of a family, a neighborhood, a city, state and country. Your children are growing up or they are grown but they are still your children, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." You are blessed with a job and income and you live in a world of need. You have a church, a pastor, teachers and friends,

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." What would it look like if you were to apply yourself and all that you are: your giftings, intelligence, time, your ambition and energy to the interests of God and the furtherance of His agenda in this world in whatever areas that He might turn your attention toward? In other words, how engaged are you in the task of increasing the purposes of God by applying yourself and all the gifts that He has given to you in that task?

The third employee in the story received the 1 million dollars to invest on behalf of the boss. Our usual reading of the story sees this man as having received so much less than the others that maybe he would not have been as excited and challenged by his opportunity. This is a misreading of the story - he got a million dollars! But unlike the others who were immediately engaged by their new opportunity, this employee was filled with fear. His answer was to bury the money, to hide it and keep it safe. It is not certain that he was conscious of this but when he buried the money he was able to forget about it and to live as if he were not trusted by his boss to invest a million dollars and to do all that he could to increase his bosses' holdings. When the boss returned he thought that he had a good answer. He did not want to lose his bosses' money so he hid it and kept it safe and he was eager to return it to his boss as it was his money and it did not belong to him. But his boss was very angry. He saw through the employee's excuses and knew that he had been lazy and irresponsible. Instead of making any effort to complete his assignment, he had only hidden from it. Instead of reward he faced punishment for his dishonesty and disregard.

Hiding the money was a way of taking back his life when in effect, his boss had claimed his life for himself. Christians also can take back their lives instead of living them for God. Your life is full of blessings. God's grace is everywhere. Our privileges are immense when compared with previous generations and with other places both now and in the past. We live in an age of freedom and opportunity. Whether or not you consider your family heritage to be an advantage or otherwise, we all have every opportunity to rise above the limitations that might hold us back and become more and greater for God. Every effort requires some risk. You might fail. You could be rejected. People you would like to help may

not be interested in receiving your gifts. None of these factors need limit you. God has given grace and opportunity. Doors are open. Will you step up? Don't bury your gifts. They are His and not your own. Use them for Him. Give yourself to making Him successful, to accomplishing His will. When He comes, He will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

And notice that Jesus stands our image of heaven on its head. We think of heaven as sitting, playing harps and worshipping and sitting, playing harps. The boss said to his good and faithful servants, "You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord!"

There is no need to separate the ruling over many things from the entering into the joy of the Lord. God has put within us the desire to have purpose, to be industrious, to accomplish tasks and to have a sense of satisfaction associated with the engagement of mind and body in productive enterprise. In eternity, why would this change? "I will make you ruler over many things..."