

**MATTHEW 25:14-30**  
**ST JOHN'S, 19.11.17, 9.30 am**

**INTRODUCTION**

Well, that's not fair, is it?! *To every person who has something, even more will be given, and he will have more than enough; but the person who has nothing, even the little that he has will be taken away from him* (v 29).

But if we stop and think about it for a moment, there are plenty of examples in everyday life which illustrate the truth of this principle. If we use the abilities we have, we become more able. It's true in a physical sense: exercise improves our general fitness, reduces stress, boosts energy, and so on. And it's true in relation to any skill, whether we're thinking in terms of artistic, academic or homemaking skills: *To every person who has something, even more will be given, and he will have more than enough; but the person who has nothing, even the little that he has will be taken away from him.*

**THE PARABLE**

But what's the story all about? We know it better as the Parable of the Talents. I learnt something while I was preparing for this sermon: the English word 'talent', meaning 'innate ability or aptitude', comes from this parable! But the Greek word simply meant a weight, and came to mean a large amount of money. That's why the GNB rightly translates 'talent' here simply as a sum of money. It was a huge sum of money though. On one calculation, one talent would be worth nearly £340,000 today. So the servant with five talents had about £1.7 million to invest,

and the one with two talents, nearly £700,000! In other words, the master in the story entrusted his servants with the equivalent of about £2.7 million!

Jesus doesn't make it clear at the beginning of the story that the master expected his servants to use the money for trading. But he does say, *After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them* (v 19), which shows that the servants were supposed to be making him a profit with their share of his property.

If we're going to understand how this story is relevant to us, as Jesus' followers today, we need to think a bit about its context. A couple of weeks ago, we noticed that Jesus had left the temple and the crowds behind him. His public teaching is over. So Jesus tells this story to his disciples in private; there are no Pharisees, Sadducees, teachers of the law, or even any bystanders. Jesus is teaching his followers about the end of the age, about his own return to earth.

This story is one of five, through which Jesus teaches his disciples to be prepared for his Second Coming. Immediately before this story is last week's story of the wise and foolish bridesmaids. Jesus tells these stories to make two main points. The first point is that Jesus is coming back again, but we must be prepared to wait for a long time before he does. The foolish girls from last week's story were caught out because *the bridegroom was late in coming*. In today's story, Jesus says that the servants' master came back *after a long time*. Yes, it's now nearly 2,000 years later. Yes, it's tempting to think that maybe Jesus isn't

coming after all. But don't give in to that temptation. Jesus will come back, just as he promised when he first told these stories.

The second point Jesus makes in these stories is a warning; it's a warning about what will happen to those people who aren't ready when he does come back. The foolish girls were shut out of the wedding feast. The good-for-nothing servant in this story is *thrown outside in the darkness* where he can weep and wail over his stupidity! *Be on your guard, then, Jesus says, because you do not know what day your Lord will come (24:42)*. Like the wise bridesmaids, we should be prepared to greet Jesus at a moment's notice when he returns. Like the good and faithful servants, we should make good use of the time while Jesus is away.

The question is, what is good use of our time? How do we do the equivalent of investing our master's money and making a profit on it? How can we be sure, when the time comes, that we will hear our Lord's commendation, *Well done, you good and faithful servant?*, rather than his condemnation, *You bad and lazy servant?*

The clue is there in the master's commendation of his *faithful* servants. Our basic responsibility as Jesus' followers, while we wait for him to come back, is to be *faithful* to him.

Because the word 'talent' in English has come to mean 'innate ability or aptitude', that's how we tend to interpret this story. 'You have a talent - a gift - well, use it, or lose it!' But the master in the story doesn't share his money amongst every Tom, Dick or Sally (whereas the Lord does

give every human being natural abilities or talents). No, the master in the story shares his money amongst his own servants, *according to their ability*. So the money in the story probably represents the specific privileges, opportunities and responsibilities each one of us has because we're followers of Jesus. So, if we're to do the equivalent of investing our master's money and making a profit on it, we need to be seeking to make the best use of any opportunities we have, to act in the way Jesus would do. We need to think in terms of honouring Jesus at all times and in all places; we need to think in terms of doing and saying things which will bring glory to God and show other people how much he loves them; we need to think in terms of standing up for Jesus and standing out as his followers.

Some of us have greater opportunities and responsibilities than others. That doesn't matter. What does matter is that we're faithful. If you're the next Billy Graham or Graham Kendrick, and you don't fulfil your potential, you're in danger of being called a *bad and lazy servant*. But the Lord doesn't expect all of us to be great evangelistic speakers or songwriters. What he does expect is that we're all *faithful*, and that each one of us makes the best use of the opportunities we receive.

Let's think for a moment about the *bad and lazy*, or *useless* servant in the story. His problem was that he just didn't 'get it'; he didn't understand the kind of responsibility which his master was giving him. He took the easy option, the safe option. Back then, burying treasure was considered to be the best way to keep it safe. But the good-for-nothing servant didn't realise that his master wasn't interested in

keeping the money safe. The master wanted him to put it to good use, to take risks, because that's the only way to make any more money. We're like that servant if we play it safe; we're like that servant if the only thing we're concerned about is not doing anything wrong; we're like that servant if we don't want anything to change, either in our personal lives or in the life of our Church. If any of that rings true in your life, then be warned. The good-for-nothing servant in the story was publicly humiliated, he had his share of the money taken away from him, and then he was thrown outside in the darkness and abandoned to cry and grind his teeth. Jesus is warning us: if we're not faithful to him while he's away, that's what will happen to us when he comes back.

And the good and faithful servants? They didn't just get a pat on the back from their master! Having been *faithful in managing small amounts*, they were *put in charge of large amounts* (vv 21,23). If we prove ourselves faithful to the Lord in whatever he's entrusted to us, then he will reward us with greater responsibility! So if you're like me, and you long to see God's kingdom advancing and expanding; if you long to see people coming to know the Lord; if you long to see revival in our nation - then be faithful in the opportunities the Lord gives you. Prove yourself capable of taking on more. But above all, remember that it's the Lord who decides what level of responsibility he gives you.