



### **THE WASTED TALENT**

Has anyone 'given up' something for Lent? Something they really enjoy? Chocolate, maybe? Alcohol? Box-sets? We often view Lent in that way, don't we? In fact, many people view the whole of Christianity like that – in terms of what we *don't* do, rather than what we *do*, do.

But perhaps there's another way of looking at this? Rather than seeing Lent as a time to empty ourselves, perhaps we should see it as a time to recognise what God has filled us with – and use it, for Him? With that in mind, I'd like you, just for a moment, to have a think about each of these:

- An activity you love to do.
- A subject that interests you.
- An area you're skilled in.

Keep those things in mind as we look at another of Jesus' parables: the Mysterious Story of the Wasted Talent.

#### **Matthew 25:14-30**

In Jesus' day, if you were a powerful or influential person and you had a trip to make, you would have to leave your estate in the hands of someone else – people you could trust. Now this was a risky thing to do. Would those people stay faithful and continue to serve you in your absence? Would they look after things as wisely as *you* would?

That's the picture Jesus paints here. A businessman is about to head off on a business trip, and he entrusts his wealth to his servants: 5 talents to one; 2 talents to another; and 1 talent to another. And as the story unfolds, we realise that 2 of them are wise and faithful; 1 is not.

What is Jesus doing here? Giving a course in effective business-management, 1<sup>st</sup> century-style? No, this is an allegory – of Jesus' ascension and return, and the opportunities that are available to us, in-between.

What opportunities? What are we talking about here?

**1) We're Talking Roles.** Nowadays we think of a talent as being a particular skill (just think Simon Cowell – or maybe not). We talk about people having a talent for cooking delicious meals, or designing beautiful jewellery, or achieving impossible times, or writing unforgettable songs, or making incredible films, or telling hilarious jokes, or preaching inspirational sermons (not that I'm fishing).

But I think Jesus means something much, much more.

In Jesus' day, a talent was more than just a currency; it represented entire estates. And just as the businessman in the story entrusts everything he owns to his servants, so God has entrusted everything He owns ... to us. People; time; nature; food; creativity; expertise; wisdom; work; money; possessions; life. All of which means that:

- Everything is of incredible value to God.
- Everything ultimately belongs to God, not us.
- Everything has been given to us to use for Him.

I.e. God has placed His Kingdom into our hands. We may have different strengths and abilities and start-positions, but we all have something to do, all have a part to play.

**2) We're Talking Risks.** When the businessman returns, he finds 2 of the servants have made sound investments; 1 has not. And he commends the first 2 servants, but condemns the other. Which raises this question:

What would have happened had the wise servants invested the cash ... and made a loss? Rather than a gain?

A clue is in the words of the business-owner. To the first 2 servants, he says, "Well done, good and *faithful* servant!" Notice, he says "*faithful* servant", not fruitful (remember, the absence of a master was a test of a servant's love and loyalty). But to the third servant, he says, "You wicked, lazy servant! At the very least you could have given the money to a banker and gained interest on it!" Now charging interest was condemned under Jewish Law (Deuteronomy 23:19-20), so what is the businessman actually saying here? He's saying, "Even *misusing* the money would have been better than doing nothing at all with it!"

Sometimes we can be so scared of getting it wrong, playing it badly, that we bury our talents in the ground, i.e. we play it safe. It might be down to fear

or pride or uncertainty, but the result is the same: we waste that opportunity. And according to Jesus, that is the worst mistake of all.

Because faith – true faith – always implies risk.

No risk, no faith.

**3) We're Talking Rewards.** The first 2 servants are both rewarded for their endeavours; the third one is thrown out on his ear / rear. So, what's the reward? What does the master give them for their loyalty and hard work? The answer is stated twice (so it obviously matters!), in vs21 and vs23: the servants get a share in their master's happiness, or *chara* in Greek, *samach* in Hebrew. Joy.

Now Jesus is making an incredibly profound statement here – one that flies in the face of Freudian psychology and so much of what 21<sup>st</sup> century consumerism is all about. He's saying true joy can only be found in pleasing God. Not pleasing ourselves – pleasing God. Why? Because that's what we've been designed for; that's what we've been built to do. One of the great ironies of life is: if we spend all of our time pursuing happiness, chances are, we won't find it. We need to be pursuing the *source* of happiness – God Himself. Because to be loved by God, to love Him in return, and to show His love to others, through the things we say and do ... *that's* where joy comes from.

And if we have the maturity to acknowledge it, being used by God may actually be a reward in itself.

### **The Moral Of the Story ...**

What's the moral? Perhaps the words of the master (see vs29): use it, or lose it! Now that doesn't mean that our place in God's Kingdom is dependent on our actions, but it does mean that our actions are a reflection of our place in God's Kingdom (important distinction, that).

I.e. if we recognise the incredible possibilities that God has entrusted to us, it's a sign we're in the right place.

So, what part of God's Kingdom has He placed in *your* hands? Or as Jesus said to the disciples when they were surrounded by thousands of hungry people, "What have you got?" (Mark 6:38). What talents do you possess? What skills? What resources? What knowledge? What relationships? What background? What experiences? What interests? What opportunities? And how can you use them? For Him?

May we come to see the value in who we are and what God has given us. And may we have the faith, courage and vision to use it for His glory, and for the blessing of others.