

Using Our Talents

The story is told of two men going for a drive. They drove off the main road and came to a barren piece of land. Walter stopped the car and scanned the land. He wanted his friend Arthur to purchase the land with him. Walter said that he would handle the project if Arthur would invest with him. Walter said to him that if he invested, the land in front of him would increase in value some several hundred times in the next five years.

Arthur could not see it and so declined his offer.

And so it was that Art Linkletter turned down the opportunity to buy the land that became Disneyland, the land that his friend Walt Disney tried to talk him into.

Today we meet with Jesus speaking about three men, all with the wonderful opportunity to invest and to develop and to be fruitful.

All Christians are gifted by God and we all possess different talents.

What is a talent?

We have taken the word talent and turned it into a word which now means a particular gift that we possess. But originally the word talent meant the weight of silver. So Jesus uses a parable that would sit comfortably in the chamber of commerce.

Talent was a heavy weight of silver, equivalent to 15 years wages. So this is a major amount of wealth. In other words, God has blessed us mightily and he expects us to use this gifting.

Every Christian has been blessed in this way. God has poured his spirit into our hearts. So God wants us to use his gifts, to use his talents, to the best of our abilities.

Walt Disney had a wonderful talent and he was going to make sure that he would build his kingdom with it.

Christ is speaking to his disciples, about Kingdom building.

To those who are committed to following in His way the question about the Kingdom of Heaven and His return to earth was a burning issue. It was on the lips of Jewish people in His day, *when will this Kingdom come?*

How long until the Kingdom of God comes, they asked. What they didn't realise was that the Kingdom was already with them through Jesus, and it depended on them investing the gifts that God had given them.

Here we see Christ telling them not to idle their time with speculation but to use their time profitably, investing in the Kingdom, building for the future.

The parable is simple, it is about a landlord, who was going away for a long time. So he gives them all talents. The Master in the story is Christ, and he was soon to leave them, but as he goes he blesses them with special gifts. Gifts which are to be used wisely.

Of course, the gift that he is speaking about is his Spirit. When Christ ascended into heaven the Holy Spirit came and resided in the hearts of his followers and the Holy Spirit produces gifts and these gifts are called Fruits and they are love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, perseverance and self-control.

This parable reminds us that we will be answerable to God in how we used His gifts.

We are all gifted by God. We are in his debt. We owe him for our very lives and this lies at the heart of this parable. God is gracious and he gifts us. The very gift of life is a gift, and not to be wasted.

We pray, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. This rendering of the Lord's prayer reminds us of our obligation to God. We are indebted to him and so that prayer lies at the heart of the parable.

So, in this parable of three people, two double their talents and one buries it. It wasn't unusual to bury money in those days. The field was a safe place to put your money, as long as you remembered where you'd buried it and that nobody had find it, then your money would be quite safe hidden in the ground, and that's what one of the men did, he literally took his talent and buried it six feet under the ground. It was like a lamp with a bushel, it gave no light to others, it was like salt trampled into the earth, it could do no good and Jesus highlights the folly of this person. He had been given much but he had abused his privileges.

Oh, what a sad day when Jesus calls this man to show how he invested his gifts.

This parable tells us that Jesus is coming back. He will return and when he returns, he will ask what we have done with his gifts.

The Master was a long time in coming but he returned, and he called the three people to himself.

How did they feel on this day of judgement?

The outcome is that the two who had doubled their talents were highly commended and they were given even more. One would imagine that they would leave feeling rewarded, satisfied and happy because they are encouraged to enter into the Master's joy. Of course Jesus is speaking of heaven, he is speaking of the rewards for those who have been faithful. That should encourage us all this morning, that if we have been working for the Lord, investing his talents, and using his talents to his glory; if we have been shining brightly our light that others may seek his good works, then be encouraged for this a great reward.

You will be called good and faithful servant.

Walt Disney is attributed with the saying, "If you can dream it you can do it".

One of the loveliest spiritual moments that I had was when I was on a trip to Iona and just before the service began, with candlelight in the Abbey, my church group were all introduced to the service, our names were individually called out, and the other people within the abbey cheered as we entered the Sanctuary – what a great welcome and feeling – I can remember tears of joy flowing down some cheeks because they had never felt so special. Another time was when graduating after studying for the ministry and that sense of being acknowledged for the years of hard work, and you've probably been there, but it will pale into insignificance with the welcome that Christians will receive when Christ comes or we enter his Kingdom.

Christ tells us that the angels rejoice over one sinner who repents, can you imagine the feelings of euphoria when you hear Christ say, *well done good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things, enter the joy of the Lord?*

Friends, that is our goal as Christians. This life is preparation for the next and it cannot be clearer that we must take his gifts, use them wisely, develop them and spread them and so help to build the Kingdom.

But it would be remiss of me today, if I never mentioned the outcome of the man who buried the talent.

The man who missed out in the treasure.

He said, that this reason for burying his talent, was that the Master was a hard man, reaping where he did not sow and gathering where he had not planted. In reality this servant didn't really know his Master. He made wrong assumptions.

Was he just bone idle lazy? Was he fearful?

He buried his talent; he buried the precious gift that God gave him, and now it was too late. He would receive his reward, which wasn't the joy of the Lord but he was cast outside the kingdom in a place of darkness and sadness.

Yes, this parable has a nasty sting in its tail. It's great, if we are people who are living close to the Lord and using his gifts, whatever they may be, and there are many people in this church who use their talents for the Lord, in so many ways, and that's what builds the Kingdom of God and that's what makes a church thrive.

But the challenge is always there for God's people to recognise their gifts; to take time and think about what God has given us and to lay them before him and say Lord help me to use these gifts in whatever way possible for the upbuilding of your Kingdom.

But I want you to go away today focusing on the two people who were fruitful, to learn by their example, the two people who wanted to please the Master, and share his gifts of life. For if we emulate them, then we have nothing to fear, and on that day when Jesus asks us for his gifts back, we also can say, Lord here is the one you gave me and here is the way I have used it and doubled it and then be encouraged because you will hear him say to you, *"Well done my good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord"* and Jesus describes that day to be like a wedding banquet, with food and wine and celebration, just a little glimpse of the joy and happiness that there will be in eternity.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen.