

## TALENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES: USE THEM OR LOSE THEM

Matthew 25:14-30

By Raymond White

Although we try to view life optimistically, it's pretty clear that all men are not created equal. God creates us in a variety of circumstances, some with more opportunity; some with less. That is his divine prerogative.

Many scripture lean in favor of the less blessed such as *James 5:1* *Go to now ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall be upon you.* And Jesus' story of Lazarus and the rich man. And Jesus' statement that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom. There are many verses stern warnings to rich people.

Such verses tempt us to conclude that highly blessed people are responsible to carry all of the burdens of life while less blessed people are excused from responsibility entirely. That's a wrong conclusion as we are about to learn from Jesus' parable of the One Talent Servant. From this parable we learn that those who would seem to be the most excused because they have less opportunity are not excused at all. We are each responsible to use the graces God has given us for his glory, however much or little that may be.

The story begins in verse :14. But let's skip that well known part of the story — how the master deals with the first two servants and how they double the investment — and go straight to the point of the story: the failures of the one talent servant.

The master gives this third servant a single talent then leaves town. The servant buries the talent and when the master returns, the servant returns the talent to him.

The one talent servant in Jesus' story sinned against his master in two ways: (1) he produced nothing because he was lazy, and (2) he blamed his master for his own failure because he was ungrateful.

*Matthew 25:24* *Then he that received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed. :25* *And I was afraid...*

In other words: “Master, you're hard, unbending, unforgiving, and without compassion. This assignment you've given me is too tough, you expect too much, and you're unfair.” The servant attempts to justify his own failure by making his master guilty. His accusation amounts to this: “We work and you steal.”

Many people think that God is unfair. That's a bad attitude, and a dangerous one. The false servant seeks to blame God while the true servant seeks to serve God. And the difference does not go unnoticed by God.

Here's the master's response. The sympathy that the servant expected to get is not what he got at all. He justified himself claiming to be afraid. But that was a lie, and the master knew it.

*Matthew 25:26* *Thou wicked and slothful servant. Thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not :27* *Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers and received usury.*

This King James language is obscure; here's what's going on: "Oh. So you think that I'm hard and unfair, do you? So you're afraid of me, are you? And that's why you didn't do anything with the talent I entrusted you with. Well, if that's really the truth, then why didn't you at least deposit it in a bank account and earn interest? That you wouldn't do even that much tells me that you weren't afraid at all, but just lazy, wicked, and a liar. You're fired. Get out of here."

And there you have the story of the unprofitable servant — too lazy to do anything useful then blaming God for his failures.

The moral of the story is, maybe you haven't been blessed with great privilege and great opportunity. That's no excuse. God has given you something. And whatever that something is, use it as well as you can. And don't blame him for giving others more. That you have anything at all is a blessing.

But there is another moral of this story. Aside from the failure of the bottom-rung servant, there are three levels of *acceptable* servants. The first two are obvious: the dutiful two talent servant and the superstar five talent servant. It's important to note that the two talent servant was not resentful of the five talent servant. The vast majority of us are two talent servants and are happy to be, and we are grateful that the few five talent servants lead us in the right direction. Perhaps the two talent servant of the parable asked for and received from the five talent servant some good investment advice for which he was grateful.

But besides the dutiful and the superstar servants, there is also what I call the barely acceptable servant. The master tells his one talent servant that he is rejected because he did nothing. Had he done *something, anything*, even deposited the money in the bank to earn interest, that would have been minimal but at least acceptable performance.

Some will object and say that minimal is not acceptable because it is only token. That can't be true. Minimal must be acceptable because that's what the word minimal means: the least amount that is acceptable. That's not a great goal, but it is an acceptable goal.

This is important. Why? Because there are people who truly have no talent at all and we might worry for them and wonder if they have any chance at all of pleasing God. Apparently they do. If the one talent servant had just deposited the money in the bank, he would have been accepted. That's what the master said. That is very encouraging to the many of us who at times wonder if we have anything to contribute. This parable says we do.

In the meantime, most of us struggle, I think, somewhere between the minimally performing one talent servant and the dutiful two talent servant. We leave the heavy lifting to those rare five talent servants and that's okay. We have goals for ourselves of being solid contributing two talent servants. I thank God that God accepts more than just the five talent servants because I am sure that I will never be that.