

Proper 28 / A

**R.O.I. for God's Kingdom**

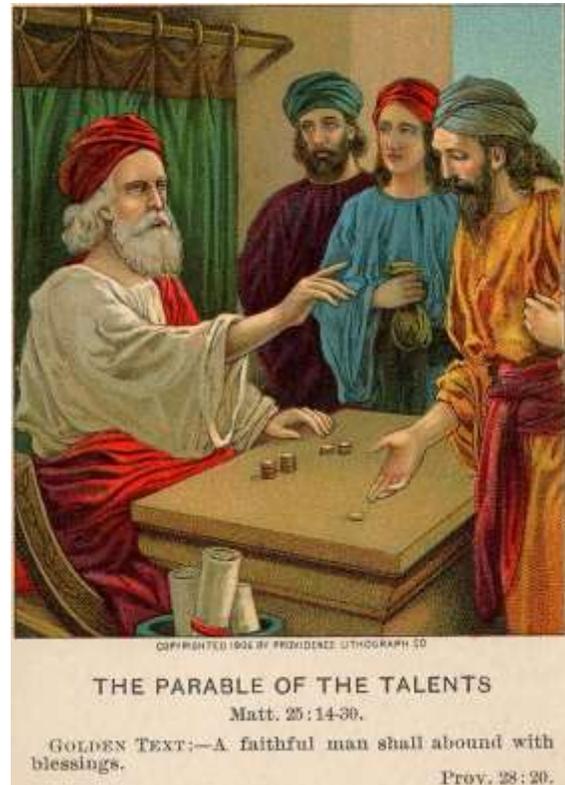
Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18; Psalm 90:1-8, 12;

Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

15 November 2020

In a rather straightforward manner, Matthew's recounting of the Parable of the Talents is a story about the manner in which God will judge the world and his people.

A man who is about to leave on a journey entrusts his servants with different portions of his property. In his absence, they are to look after and manage his wealth and ensure that it continues to work for the master, that it continues to make a profit while he is away.



The word 'talanto' in the Greek of the New Testament writers, translates as 'talent' in modern English. According to biblical scholars, a single talent represented fifteen years of wages of the average laborer in Jesus' day. So, in Jesus' telling of the story, each of these servants receives an exorbitant sum, whether it be 75 years' worth of wages, 30 years' worth, or even just 15 years' worth of wages. Each of the three servants receive a package of bank notes totaling more than they would have ever seen, or expected to be responsible for.

Clearly, the master held them each in high regard and trusted them immensely. Two of the servants double the investment they are entrusted with and are richly rewarded for doing so; but the third gains nothing for his master, all he does is keep safe what he is given. Following the custom of the time, before there were banks or other financial institutions, he buries the money so that no harm might come to it. It is safe, but there is no growth.

The result for him? While the first two are highly praised and rewarded, what was entrusted to him is taken from him – and he is cast off the estate

of his master and into the place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth! ... forever! ... in darkness! ... in torment! ...

Pretty heavy stuff this!

As I said – it is a straightforward account – this Parable of the Talents, this parable of the three servants who each are entrusted with fabulous wealth by their master – a straightforward account of how God judges the world.

So, what should we make of it?

Well ... I think we need to consider ourselves to be one of the servants in the parable. Or perhaps even as a fourth servant.

We need to consider ourselves as having been given one or two, or five, or maybe even ten talents and being left with this amount – this huge treasure – to do with what we will.

What would we do? What will we do?

I ask that because that is what God has done. God has given each one of us a fabulous treasure – each in a different but abundant measure and left what we do with it up to us.

God has trusted you, invested in you, endowed you. God has endowed me. On a global scale, God has trusted and endowed his worldwide Church to us. On a smaller scale, God has endowed this small parish.

So, we must ask, what are we doing with it?

Are we going to play it safe this endowment from God? Will we bury it? Just keep it safe? Like the third servant did?

Or are we going to risk God's gift? Allow it to grow and produce an even greater return in the world? Like the first and second servants did.

Think about it.

Think about what God has entrusted to you. Think about what God has entrusted to us.

Think about it.

Think about what we have been given in this life by our God ... what we have been entrusted with for a matter of a few years ... and what we have been promised will be ours for an eternity.

Think of the fantastic treasure that has been poured out upon us ... with the giving of each breath ... with each meal we eat ... with each person we come into contact with ... with each sight we see and sound we hear.

I don't think that most of us think about these things often enough. If we did, things would be different, wouldn't they? Different for us. Different for the world.

There is a little piece I've seen printed in various forms in different church newsletters. It goes something like this:

What would this church be like if every member were just like me?

- Would this church be empty on Sunday, or full to overflowing, if everyone attended as I do?
- How much Bible study and prayer would occur if everyone took the time I do?
- How many bruised, hurting, lonely people would be touched by the church if every member acted exactly as I do?
- Would we need more ushers and bigger offering plates if everyone gave like me?
- How many children and youth would be led to faith through the Sunday School and youth programs if everyone had my priorities?
- Would the church just be another attractive social club? Would it be closed, bankrupt, out of business? Or would it be a dynamic force for Jesus Christ in our community and in the world?
- What would this church be like - if everyone were just like me?

I realize that I am preaching to the choir somewhat, after all, you are all here with me this morning, or joining us from home, but here is the question for each and every member on the rolls of this parish: What would Church of the Messiah be like if every member were just like me?

You know ... one of the basic teachings of the Bible, of the whole Bible, the New Testament, as much if not more than the Old, is that if we don't use it, we lose it.

So, on a small scale, what would this church be like if every member was like me?

On a much larger scale, what would the world be like if every believer believed like I do?

You know the problem with the third servant, don't you? His problem was his fear. He either feared too much – or not enough. And he was so very careful of all that the master gave him. He would not risk the talent's loss; and in turn, inhibited and stunted its growth.

Like the man who is afraid to love ... because he might get hurt.

Like the woman who is afraid to reach out ... because she might be rejected.

Like the child who is afraid to walk ... because he might fall down.

The third servant was afraid; and as is the case with most all fears, his fear came true – what he had was not enough for his master.

The third servant was afraid. He was afraid even though the constant message of God – the message given whenever God visits his people is “be not afraid.”

Be not afraid.

Be not afraid of losing what you have. Be not afraid of being alone. Be not afraid of being hated. Be not afraid of suffering or dying.

Trust God. Trust in the one who said: “they who seek to save their lives will lose them, but they who give their lives for me and for the gospel, will save them.”

Trust in the one who gave himself and died on the cross – and who in doing so made an end of death.

The Parable of the Talents is not a lesson about our degree of ability or productivity.

It is a lesson about our attitude and our responsibility. It is a lesson about stepping out with God’s treasure in our hands and risking it all for the sake of God ... about really daring to love ... really daring to care ... stepping out and risking all, even though the conditions don’t seem right for it. Stepping out and risking all, even though the persons involved do not really seem worthy of it. Stepping out and risking all, even though a thousand and one bad things might happen.

The sin of the third servant that could not be forgiven is the sin of not daring to risk ... the sin of not trusting the one who gave his life for us to raise us up when we give our lives for him.

The mystery of the Gospel is not entrusted to the Church to be buried in the ground. The joy of the Gospel is not entrusted to us to be locked away in a bank or safety deposit box. It is given to the Church in order to be risked in the change and interchange of the spiritual commerce of humanity.

Be not afraid ... if we invested ourselves as well as we are able to in God’s work ... if we use the gifts of God for the glory of God, God will be pleased with us ... and we will enter into his joy. And we will abide in the blessedness saved up for all who trust and believe, both now and evermore. . . . Amen.