

What is the greatest talent / treasure that you have been given... entrusted with?

What are you doing with it?

This parable—the Parable of the Talents, as it is commonly known—is told as part of a long teaching series near the end of Jesus’ life. A plot to stop Jesus... to silence him... is already underway...

There is an intensity and urgency in his teaching here... as if Jesus is summing things up / pulling the final pieces together...

This is the third of four stories that Jesus tells about the implications of the coming (but un-calendared) eschaton. All four stories center on the return of the master or bridegroom or king... the judgments that come with that return... and how those who await his return spend their time...

With these parables, Jesus is preparing his followers, as best he can, for his departure...

With these parables he is cautioning readiness... preparedness... alertness...

With these parables he is encouraging active participation in the work that is to be carried out in his absence...

Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away...

In today’s world, we use the word “talent” to refer to someone’s abilities or gifts; but in Jesus’ day, a “talent” was a unit of money—a very large unit of money.

One talent was equivalent to about 6000 denarii. A denarii was a day’s wages for a common laborer. So, a single talent would be worth nearly 20 years’ wages... five talents would be worth ~100 years’ wages... two talents, worth forty years’ wages.

You see, while it doesn’t sound like much on the surface, even the slave given just one talent is entrusted with a huge amount.

Can you imagine being responsible for such large sums of money?

As Jesus tells the parable, the first two slaves “work with / invest”... make good use of the talents entrusted to them... and both reap great returns.

When their master comes back, he is very pleased—“*Well done, good and faithful slave*” he says to each of them, “*you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.*”

Both are promised more responsibility in the future... both are invited to share in their master’s joy...

But not the third slave. He takes a very different approach with the talent he is given. He plays it safe... and hides it because he is afraid. He digs a hole and buries his talent in the ground. No risk, no reward... no harm done, right?!

But his master is not pleased. That slave's one talent is taken from him and given to another slave... and instead of being invited to join in his master's joy, he is thrown "*into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*"

It seems a bit extreme, don't you think? So, what's going on here?

What is Jesus' point? What exactly is he trying to say?

Is this Jesus' way of telling his disciples—as he anticipates his death / departure—that he has entrusted them with an incredible treasure... that they are responsible to use / invest their talent(s) for the sake of the kingdom?

Is this his way of telling them not to bury / hide the incredible gift that has been entrusted to their care?

Clearly, given its context, this is not a parable about investing / increasing one's own wealth (as it is sometimes used).

It is about faithful living... it is about "investing" ourselves and our talent(s) / taking risks.

It is about Jesus, himself, and what he has done... and what is about to happen to him. Mostly, it is about what he hopes... and expects of his followers after he is gone.

It is about being a disciple / follower of Jesus... and what it means to be faithful to him.

And so, I guess, this parable is about you and me.

The greatest risk of all, it turns out, is doing nothing... playing it safe...

If Jesus is the master and we are his slaves / servants, then we have been entrusted with an incredible treasure that no one can afford.

Could that treasure be, as Martin Luther wrote, "*the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God*"? the good news of God's love and forgiveness for us / for all?

What always catches me, in this parable, is the third slave—how differently he responds (from his fellow slaves)... because of his perception of his master.

He believes his master to be harsh and hard in his dealings... so he buries the talent entrusted to him... out of fear.

Is his assessment of his master accurate / justified? Is what he thought he knew true?

Neither of the other two slaves voice this same concern or affirm this same sentiment. Neither of them seem to be afraid of their master (even though they are entrusted with much more... and therefore have more to lose).

Whatever it was that caused the third slave to fear his master... did not have the same effect on the first two. They obviously saw something different... and that changed everything.

How often is that true in our everyday lives?! What we expect is often what we see...

What we experience of life is often shaped by our expectations...

Is the same true of our picture / our expectations of God, our master?

Does God become for us what we believe God to be?

Do our perceptions of God—what we “*know*” God to be (or think we “*know*” God to be)—keep us from seeing the whole picture of God—the God that Jesus reveals to us?

For some, God is gracious and loving and kind... for others, God is harsh and stern and demanding.

For some, God is generous and protective and forgiving... for others, God is judging and angry and vengeful.

The perceptions / expectations we have of God... shape not just how we think about God; they shape our everyday actions / how we live each day... they shape how we respond to the incredible treasure God has entrusted to us...

Dear friends, I think it’s helpful to remember that Jesus tells this parable just days before he will be arrested... just days before he will give his life on the cross—NOT to make it possible for God to love and forgive us... but to show us that God loves and forgives us – already! ...to show us just how far God will go to communicate God’s love for us / this world.

Jesus spent his life and ministry proclaiming God’s kingdom come—feeding the hungry, healing the sick, casting out demons, offering forgiveness, and welcoming into God’s loving embrace all who recognize their need. And for that message he was crucified. And just in case we miss or underestimate that message, God raises Jesus on the 3rd day so that we might know that love is more powerful than hate... that life is stronger than death.

That is the God that Jesus shows us.

That is the God who has placed great trust in us... entrusting each of us with talent(s) to use and “invest”/ with an incredible treasure to share—the good news of relationship with the God made known in Jesus Christ.

So... the God we see in Jesus, it turns out, is not “*a harsh God, reaping where God did not sow, and gathering where God did not scatter seed*”...

The God we see in Jesus is a generous God who gives more than we deserve... who gathers what we offer back in joy...

The God we see in Jesus is the God who loves us and accepts us... who believes in us and trusts us more than we probably deserve... and who invites us into God’s own joy...

Thank you, God, for entrusting so much to us. Help us to overcome our fear... to share your blessings generously and boldly with the world...and lead us all to the joy of our master, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.