

The Wise Investor

Matthew 25:14-20 (the parable of the talents)

Introduction

1. The parable of the three servants and the talents gives us a lot to think about, especially as we reflect on the uniqueness that God has given to each of us.
2. The moral of the story is obviously to invest what we've been given. As we look at this parable, and some other incidents in the life of Jesus, our first example in the life of service to God and man, we can uncover a few other important lessons as well – for each of us, for all of us.

First let us look at the context in which Jesus shared his story of the servants and the talents.

The Third Servant

Jesus, in this parable, was not making an idle point. It is said that he was referring specifically to a certain group of religious leaders whom he compared to the last servant who buried his talent in the ground.

What did he refer to?

Jesus seems in this parable to be referring to the investment God has made in these leaders: teaching them, training them, and the Source of their abilities and gifts. Yet Jesus critiques, through his parable, their failure to invest these gifts in the people around them. Instead, the talent is buried in the ground, for fear of the wrath of the master in case it is lost. And the questions comes up: For what did God give the leaders their position, their training, their abilities, if not for investment in the children of God?

Now let us go back to the parable.

The First Two Servants

Regarding the first two servants: as we know, they seemed to be quite successful in their investment. But what would have happened if they had let themselves be taken by selfish thoughts? And let us put ourselves in their shoes.

How about the servant who receive two talents?

- a) He could have been depressed: “Hey, the other guy got five, and I only got two. O no, I’m a failure in life!” (Comment on our own tendencies to do this. A brief example is best.)
- b) He could have gotten jealous: “Why did he get five and me two? If I’d gotten five I could have pulled off greater things than him!”
- c) He could have gotten resentful: “Why only two lousy talents? Aren’t I good enough? Who does the boss think I am anyway?”
- d) He could have felt worthless without value: “Oh Lord, I just can’t get it together. I can’t bear this burden. I’m just no good!”
- e) And on, and on, and on. Can you relate to any of these feelings?

And how about the servant that got the five talents?

- a) He could have gotten arrogant: “Look at those other two fools! They’re never gonna get anywhere. Justly the Lord has given ME five talents. I can make real use of them.”
- b) He could have gained ‘recognition’ through reminding them that HE had received the five talents, making them feel very clearly their own inadequacies. Vain glory for one who hasn’t even done anything yet!

But the two servants in Jesus’ story did the right thing. They each took what the master had given them and invested without hesitation and without being caught up in self-centered thoughts. And listen to the response of the returned master after he hears the report of each of the two: “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.”

The master says the same thing to each of the two. Their reward is equal even though their accomplishments were of different sizes. The main point of the parable has nothing to do with the material gain (the external result) but with the heart of each person. Both servants, sincerely and with effort, invested, and fulfilled their responsibility.

In our lives we are so prone to taking the attitudes that we pointed out earlier about the gifts, or lot in life that we’ve been given by God. But in the midst of our concerns we do not see our chances to offer what we have. Isn’t this missing the whole

point of living? Whether we have a lot or a little. And we may move closer to the place of the third servant!

One of the beautiful incidents of heartfelt investment in the Bible is the story of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. As Sunday school children we may have been awestruck at such a miracle, but as we consider more deeply and read the story (Matthew 14:15-21) we see that the miraculous multiplication of the bread and fish came from Jesus' heart of real concern for the hungry people. The heart of love and concern for others came first, and it was that that made the miracle possible.

It isn't whether we've received a lot or a little, but the sincere and loving investment that determines what God can bring forth out of our lives. (A good example, here, is Helen Keller)

A final note on the last servant

The last servant, who didn't invest, gives this reply to the master upon his return: "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow: so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."

The last servant is typical of those who have been caught by fear of doing the wrong thing, or who justify inaction, in their lives of Christian service, and end up doing nothing, and gaining nothing for the kingdom. This person needs to seriously reflect on their relationship with "the master" – with God and Christ.

Conclusion

Please read again Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. Remember, he told his disciples: "...greater works than these will you do..." in John 14:12.

God doesn't need us to sit and wonder how those "5 loaves and 2 fish" are even to be enough! The "5000" (the world, those around us) are so hungry. As we sincerely break the bread and fish and offer from the heart, God will multiply it by the basketsful.