

Sermon Topic: "Talent: Have You Buried It?" by Preacher Wendy Chiang  
Sermon Text: Matthew 25:14-30

### **A. Introduction**

- The Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30) is a story illustrating how God's people should live as Kingdom people while waiting and watching for Jesus' return.
- This story of estate management was a familiar one to Jesus' original audience. It was common for wealthy landowners in 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman Palestine to divide their wealth among trusted servants to manage and enhance their master's position and wealth.
- This story draws parallels:
  - Christ as the master who goes away for a long time (between his ascension and 2<sup>nd</sup> coming)
  - Us, as his servants, whom He has entrusted His talents to.
  - Moral of story: we should use what we have been given (whether little or much) to the best of our ability for Christ. For one day, we'll be called to account before Him.
- We'll most likely aspire to be like the two men in the parable who grew their master's wealth. However, we may struggle like the one talent man in practical living. What can we learn from him?

### **B. So, What Is The Socio-Economic Background Of Those Days?**

- The master was "following what many others did with money they weren't using. This action was not unusual in Palestine, as there were no banks (as we know them today), except in the temple, which had a treasury and was used for money-changing. A person leaving on a trip could safeguard his money by burying it or leaving it with a trusted client or servant, both common practices." – Nelson's Bible Encyclopaedia for the Family (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982) pg 200
- Apparently, this practice was mentioned by Jesus in the parable of the hidden treasure (Matthew 13:44).
- At the same time, the practice of commercial investments with loans and credit was also common in New Testament society. Bankers who operated with a table in the marketplace (aka money changers) seemed to be roles recognised by Jesus and referenced in His parable.

### **C. So, What Is A "Talent"?**

- One talent was estimated to be worth 20 years of salary: a large sum of money.
  - Talent in the Old Testament refers to a unit of weight.
  - Talent in the New Testament refers to a sum of money.

- The Oxford Dictionary defines talent as “a natural skill, or personal ability”. This definition is derived from the parable of the talent.
- While talent refers to wealth in its original context, it can also be expanded to include both wealth and resources in our context. Hence we are all talented because we have been entrusted with a certain amount of wealth and resources.

#### **D. So, Where Do We Get Our Talents From?**

- Hereditary
  - What our family may pass down to us, special endowment to family lineage.
- Natural
  - Abilities we are born with that become apparent as we mature, and through opportunities and environments that facilitate their expression.
- Learnt
  - Through observation, trial and error, training and discipline (practice makes permanent).
- Holy Spirit
  - Abilities that are spiritual in nature and serve a spiritual purpose. May or may not overlap with natural abilities.
- Whether our talents are hereditary, natural, learnt or from the Holy Spirit, “every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17)
- J.C. Ryle write “Anything whereby we may glorify God is a talent. Our gifts, our influence, our money, our knowledge, our health, our strength, our time, our senses, our reason, our intellect, our memory, our affections. Our privileges as members of Christ’s Church, our advantages as possessors of the Bible. All these are talents. Where came these things? Whose hand bestowed them? Why are we what we are? There is only one answer to these questions. All that we have is a loan from God. We are God’s stewards. We are God’s debtors. Let this thought sink deeply into our hearts.”

#### **E. So, What Purposes Do Our Talents Serve?**

- Bless and benefit others (1 Peter 4:10)
- Build God’s Kingdom wherever we are placed
- Be a diligent steward for Jesus till He returns to reward us (v14, 21,23, 1 Cor 4:2)

#### **F. So, Why Did The One Talent Man Hide His Talent?**

- Since it was culturally acceptable for the one talent man to bury money for security or invest for profit, why was he faulted for his choice?
- The use of the word “but” (in v 18 and 26) gives us some revelation and reflection.

- “But” is a powerful word. A storyteller uses it to highlight contrast, throws tension in the plot, and surfaces unspoken assumptions:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> man worked his talents, 2<sup>nd</sup> man worked his talents, we would assume the 3<sup>rd</sup> man would work his talents. BUT HE BURIED IT.
  - 1<sup>st</sup> man was praised, 2<sup>nd</sup> man was praised, we would assume 3<sup>rd</sup> man would be praised since he chose a culturally acceptable action. BUT HE WAS CONDEMNED.
  
- One talent man: What assumptions did Jesus surface through the rebuke?
  - ➔ His Misjudgement: The one talent man perceived his master as a hard man, harvesting where he had not sown and gathering where he had not scattered seed. However, would a hard man entrust his talents to his servants, share with them profits of investment or invite them into his joy (indicating a change of status of relationship). An exploiter or tyrant would not do this. The one talent man zoomed in on the master’s character instead of his personal responsibility.
  
  - ➔ His Motivation: The one talent man claimed that he hid the talent due fear. But fear should have led him to secure the talent with the bankers who would give interest on deposit. Fear should have led him to thoughtfully think of his master’s interest. Instead, he chose the easier option: take effort to bury it rather than take effort to attend to it. What was the one talent man planning to do with the remaining time till his master return? The time of absence was long enough was the man to attend to his personal interest than to the interest of the master. His action was based on his personal convenience and indulgence rather than his master’ interest.
  
  - ➔ Matter of the Heart: How he dealt with what he was entrusted showed where his allegiance lied. He was not watching and waiting for his master, but did as he pleased.

### **G. So, Why Do We Hide Our Talents?**

- The word “but” invites us into the story. We too, like the one talent man, have our assumptions of Jesus and this will force us to confront our stewardship. By whose authority are we going to accept on what is given to us?

- Misjudgement
  - we may not think of Christ as being demanding, or difficult to please. We may even agree that God is indeed generous (whether in terms of bestowing actual wealth or wealth of abilities, knowledge, skills, etc).
  - But have we misjudged his character: that it is expected of God to be generous with us but it is ok for us to be tight-fisted with him?
  - Do we think that it is ok to hide our talent while telling ourselves or even God: it's ok, God is forgiving and gracious. He will overlook this.
  
- Motivation
  - We fear being judged by others for the way we use our talents or
  - We fear the success that come with using our talents – we fear the church or the world might ask us for more and more. We fear being taken advantage of, so we opt for self-preservation instead. Be safe, be average, hide the talents.

At the end of the day, the heart of this matter is the matter of our heart:

- How we choose to use/invest/steward our talents will reveal where our allegiance lies. The motivation of what we do with our talents and why we do them will show if our allegiance lie with convenience and luxuries or does it lie with Christ?

May we use our God-given talents to glorify Christ in the best of our ability!

### **Study and Discussion Questions**

1. Inside everyone are many personal gifts from God. Take some moments with Jesus to review your talents and be grateful for them. List them down. What are they?
2. What does this story tell you about the character and reign of God? How would you describe to someone who saw the person of God described here by Jesus – both His generosity and apparent severity.
3. How does this parable challenge your assumption about what it means to live in a world of grace?
4. What step is God calling you to make right now regarding allegiance and stewardship? What are you afraid of?