

## **What will you do with the opportunities God gives you?**

### **Introduction**

### **Matthew 25:14-30**

The New Year is well underway. Term One has started. Schools are now all back and people are back at church. And of course our ministries have begun or are about to this week. In the mix of life at home, work, church and community I want to ask the question that lends itself to our parable this morning, as an individual....

'What will you do with the opportunities God gives you?

It is also a question that we can ask ourselves as a church...

'What will we do with the opportunities God gives us?

And while we consider this question of the daily opportunities that God gives us to live for him and serve him, can you also put your answer in the context of the return of Christ. In other words, keep the end in mind, the eternal perspective that comes into play each day, for we live in the age that is between the first appearance of Christ and the second, when Christ shall return as in the context of our parable of the Talents.

Now a parable is often a significant comparison between two objects as in the case of a mirror image to teach a single concept. Some of the key words that Jesus usually concludes his spoken parables with are phrases that alert the listener to pay close attention to what was just said. Jesus wants his audience to focus on what was said in the parable so that they will make the effort to understand what it is he is trying to teach them.

In the parable of the Talents where Jesus has spoken of being entrusted with wealth, and putting it to work is an illustration taken from the original audience's everyday life to make a point. As a parable it was a story that was to be both heard, and then called for a response from its hearers.

It was written, as was the Gospel, by Matthew, also known as Levi. He was Christ's disciple and a former businessman/tax-collector, writing to an audience of Christian Jews who were those that had responded to the message of the good news believing that Jesus was the Messiah or Anointed One, the Son of God their Saviour, the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament.

In the Bible, the term talent was first used for a unit measurement of weight, equaling 34kgs, then for a unit of coinage.

When we use the term “talent” today to indicate an ability, a skill or mental power and apply it to this parable, this will easily lead us to a misunderstanding of the parable itself. I want to make it clear that human talents as we know them are not what this parable is about.

**I. The point of the parable** is that the obedient servant of Christ must be faithful, prompt, active and efficient in promoting the interests of their just, generous and exacting Master while he is away for an extended period of time. To put it another way as far as the Christian is concerned it means: **Being ready for Christ’s coming involves more than playing it safe and doing little or nothing. It demands the kind of service that produces results.** So let’s explore the parable to understand its point. First of all...

## **II. The master relinquishes vv14-18**

The kingdom of heaven is like this man said Jesus, a master of at least three men who were bound to him in servitude not as we think of servants today but as actual slaves. Slaves in the ancient world could enjoy considerable responsibility and authority, almost to the point of being considered partners in the master’s business affairs, who might even receive a share of the profits.

This master was heading off on a trip and he was going to be away for an undisclosed, yet considerable, period of time. Being the businessman that he was he did not want his assets, which included his slaves, lying idle and unproductive. So, in his prolonged absence he decided to relinquish to each of his slaves a certain portion of his money. How he does this is to give them the proportion that he judged to be suitable for their level of ability to be able to use it. According to the master’s evaluation of his slaves capacities to the first, he gives what might be if it were gold, ten million dollars in today’s terms, four million to the next and then two million to the last one. Having relinquished his wealth to his slave’s he is off! Has anyone ever given you two million dollars, let alone ten million that you had to pay back in the future? And if you had of been the third servant how would you have felt about only receiving a mere two million? ...In the kingdom of heaven then it would appear that inequality exists, as far as your considered abilities, skill and level of capacities in different areas go.

The departure of the master then serves as the green light for the ten-million dollar and the four-million dollar man to immediately put

this to work through trade, perhaps by setting up some business venture working with the capital to make it grow. I am sure it would not have been in real estate as the market back then was nothing like it is in Auckland today where if you invested in property ten to twenty years ago you will have easily doubled your money like these entrepreneurial slaves. Whatever it was that they did with the money, these two felt the weight of the responsibility of this assignment entrusted to them, went to work immediately, and doubled their master's money.

But then one servant, the two million dollar man, had other ideas. Perhaps he was jealous and aggrieved at his two fellow slaves being considered by his master as more worthy and capable in receiving more money than him. Whatever the reason, he was simply unwilling to work or take risks, except for digging a single hole to bury the money for safe keeping because apparently this was actually safer than the deposit systems of the time.

So, do you think of yourself as a ten million person, a four million person, or a two million person? Whichever one, the important thing to remember is that it is God who has given you your responsibilities and that you need to focus on how you can be faithful in handling the level or type of responsibilities that God has relinquished to you because...

### **III. The master rewards vv19-23**

After a long time the slave's master returns. The implication being that the consummation or perfect ending of the kingdom of heaven will be long delayed-And the accounting begins. "Settled accounts" is a standard commercial term. The first servant who doubled his ten million is praised especially for his faithfulness, "well done good and faithful servant" and he is rewarded with two things. The first thing he receives from the master is increased responsibility, "You have been faithful with a few things. I'll put you in charge of many things." The second reward is a share in his master's joy, "Come and share your masters' happiness." The second servant, the four million dollar man, likewise has been faithful with what was entrusted to him and gets to hear the very same words as the first servant, receiving too a reward of increased responsibility to the limit of his capacity along with a share in his master's joy.

Jesus is implying to his audience here that when the kingdom of heaven is consummated, coming to its perfect end, just as the master rewards in the parable, the kingdom is going to provide glorious new increased responsibilities. And along with those responsibilities... sheer holy delight – the master rewards, unlike what happens next.

#### **IV. The master rebukes vv 24-30**

The two million dollar man is the last to have his account settled. What happens in this interaction was quite likely an unexpected turn in the story for Jesus' hearers, or anyone for that matter.

The master condemns and rebukes the servant by his own self-incriminating words that prove his guilt. The two million entrusted to this wicked lazy servant is taken from him and the relationship between master and slave is severed. His two million go instead to the ten million dollar man.

The master sounds very much like Donald Trump on his reality TV show 'the Apprentice'. "You're fired!" Get Out! Leave the show. Is God really acting like such a sociopathic Business Owner, Banker or CEO of a large multi-national company than an all loving forgiving and merciful God?

Especially when we consider that the two million dollar man's crime and punishment was not for open contempt, deliberate insult, for loss of goods or fraud or misappropriation of the master's money. No, his rebuke was received for his unfaithful neglect to make a profit for his master's benefit. I think this parable must be where we get the modern day phrase, "use it or lose it" from. As in what we do not use we are bound to lose. Just like my 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Form French that I never developed or put to use. You will no doubt be able to come up with your own example from your life. Just like the man refused to use his two million- so he lost it.

Any Christian can learn from this rebuke, as did Jesus' audience of the day where the wicked servant was branded "worthless" v.30. Strong words indeed! For to fail to do good and use what God has entrusted to us is considered a heinous sin, which results not only in the loss of neglected resources but in rejection by the master, banishment from his presence, a flood of tears and the grinding of our own teeth.

Jesus in this parable is insisting that any disciple of his, while watching and waiting for his return, should never turn to passivity but to doing their duty, which is to develop the resources God entrusts to one until, “after along time” the master returns and settles accounts.

**From this parable the challenge remains:**

"What are you going to do with the opportunities God gives you?"

"How you are going to leverage, which means to take what you have been given as your starting point, and use it to produce results. It is the same principal as borrowing money to make more as in borrowing money to buy a company. The opportunities the Lord has given you whether it is one, two, five, or even more—how are you going to use the resources God has entrusted to you? Are you willing to stop playing it safe and step out of your comfort zone being prepared to take a few risks in order to see results?"

As a church we want to produce results with what we have been entrusted with: Think for a moment about our resources/assets and in what ways we can use them to the glory of God: A manse, a cemetery opposite the school situated on two sections. 4 other vacant sections around it and this hectare block of land leased for a number of years with a right of renewal on it, these small old facilities, chattels and a couple of hundred thousand in the bank. As a local church, a beacon of hope to those around us, our core business is to be glorifying God and proclaiming to one and all Salvation through Jesus Christ who births in us anew the Holy Spirit, forgiving us for our sins so that we might be right in our relationship with God the Father. However, we don't just seek conversions. That is just the beginning of the process of making disciples that requires baptism and teaching believers to obey 'everything' Jesus taught, in order to fulfill the great commission. Which stands along side the Great Commandment that tells us to love by practically looking to the needs and genuinely caring, supporting and advocating for our neighbour. As well as welcoming the immigrant and any one else new to the area.

**To Wrap up...**

As individuals and as a member of Christ's body the church our desire should be to hear these words spoken by the Master either when he returns or we depart from this life. "Well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's joy!"