

Watch Out! Use Your Gifts

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 12th of December 2004. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled, Watch Out, Use Your Gifts, and is based on Matthew chapter 25, verses 14 to 30.

As a child, one of the great joys for me was the simple banana. As you know, most of you know, I grew up on a farm quite away from the tropics, and so a banana was one of those rare treats where we would have one banana a week.

That's all. Just one banana a week. And so you'd want to make sure that you got the full benefit of your one banana a week. Normally I'd take advantage of my half a banana in the mornings.

It was a great time. I found that I could get this banana to last quite some time. What I would do is I would, to make sure I got two hits at my one banana, I'd work out with one of my sisters, you want to do a swap this week.

[1 : 15] I'll have half on Monday with you, and then on Tuesday we'll go halves again. But we had this policy in our family, whoever cut, the other person got to choose. So I became very good at getting exactly in the halfway of the banana, taking in consideration the bend, you know, the particular bends and the thicknesses and all that type of thing.

I was very good at it. So we cut half a banana. Then I became very good at working out that you could get 18 slices of banana sliced in half a banana. So you could cut up in 18 little bits.

And then you put on a bit of toast and sprinkle a bit of the sugar. Two bits of toast. Nine bits of banana on each. Half a banana used in the morning. Fantastic. A great joy. Those mornings were just fantastic.

One particular morning, it was a tragedy. I'd spent all this time planning, cutting, slicing ever so thin, making sure they had my 18 bits of banana for my two bits of bread, sprinkled just the right amount of sugar.

It took a great deal of planning. But in the midst of that, I lost track of time. So as I walked to go towards the school bus that would pick us up at the end of our driveway, being the front paddock, being 150 metres, I sort of came through the first gate to see that the bus had already arrived.

[2 : 36] Decisions. Two bits of lovely bits of banana on bread. The bus driver doesn't want food on the bus. What do I do?

Do I miss out on the bus today and get in huge trouble or do I eat the banana? Well, the sad thing for me was I had to throw both bits of bread and the banana. I think I might have taken one bite, but that was about it.

Off it went. I had to run down to the bus and get on the bus. Now, as a child, this was a great waste, a great tragedy, one of the worst tragedies of my existence at that point.

It's funny how we look back on it. It's such a trivial thing. But back then, it was a great tragedy, a great waste, a waste of time, of banana. It was a tragedy. Well, if your life was called to an account today, your life ended or Christ came and he called your life to account, what things would you look back on and think, well, that was a waste, a waste of time, a waste of energy, a waste of resources, things thrown on the side of our life that could have been better used at a better time for a better purpose?

What things are a waste? So when we arrive on that great day of judgment, will God say, well done, good and trustworthy servant? Or will he say, you wicked and lazy servant?

[4 : 04] Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Let's pray. Father, we do indeed thank you that you have brought us into a relationship with you.

We thank you for the power to forgive sin. Father, help us not to rely on ourselves this morning as we come to your word. We pray that your spirit will be working in our lives, changing us and shaping us, helping us to see the areas in which we need to change so that we may not be Christians by name, but Christians in our doing, in our serving and in practical ways.

We pray this in your son's name. Amen. It'd be good for you to have your Bibles open at Matthew chapter 25, verses 14 through to 30.

We're in the middle of a two-part sermon series looking at the return of Christ. Can you imagine being there with Jesus?

There was Jesus and his disciples coming into Jerusalem on the last week of Jesus' life. Coming into Jerusalem on a donkey, riding in as a king.

[5 : 22] You can imagine the disciples, the great joy, the great excitement. Here was the great king, the great Messiah, coming to bring about his kingdom. You can imagine just trying to work out all these things in their head.

What's happening here? When is the kingdom going to come? Is this the moment or should we wait a little bit longer? What does Jesus keep on talking about his death? How does this all fit together? The disciples over the next couple of days would have seen Jesus clearing the temple, arguing and debating with the scribes and Pharisees, Pharisees?

And then walking out to the Mount of Olives, as standing out on the Mount of Olives, looking over Jerusalem, Jesus reflects upon the destruction of the temple and the downfall of Jerusalem.

You can hear the disciples in chapter 24, verse 3, saying, when is this going to happen? Tell us, Lord. When will the kingdom come?

When will the end be? And so we have this discourse over chapters 24 and 25 of Jesus describing the end. What will happen after the end of this week?

[6 : 38] You see, Jesus knows that the end of this week is going to be a terrible time, but also a great time. Jesus will die upon a cross and be raised again, the first in his kingdom.

But then there will be a delay, as we saw last week. And Jesus is preparing his disciples for that delay. He is helping them to understand what is to come, that the kingdom starts, but the full inauguration, the full fulfilment of that kingdom will be delayed for some time.

And so Jesus is preparing them for that. As we saw last week in last week's parable, Jesus tells them to watch out, to be prepared for that day.

On today's parable, Jesus tells them not only to be watchful, but also to use their time well. Jesus does this by telling them another parable, the parable of the talents.

In verses 14 and 15, we see there Jesus setting the scene about a man, a wealthy landowner, who comes and gathers three of his servants together and he entrusts to them some talents.

[7 : 53] Now, these talents back in those days was actually a currency. If you look down on the bottom there in the footnotes of your Bibles, you see a talent was worth more than 15 years wages of a labourer.

We're talking about a significant amount of time. If you were to add the five, the two and the one, the eight talents, that would be a total of \$2 million in our currency today.

That's a lot of money to give your slave. But back in those days, slaves had great responsibility and authority. And so this master takes off, distributing according to ability.

For those who had more ability, he gives five. To the one who has less, two and the last, one. Still a significant amount of money though. A great deal of money.

And so off goes the landowner. In verses 16 to 18, we see the results of what happens with these talents. The first one we see there, goes away, who had received the five talents, went off at once and started trading.

[9 : 01] That is, he promptly goes away. He understands his responsibility to his master. He loves his master and so off he goes and he goes away promptly to put the money to work. And we see there that he actually comes and makes five more.

Now, Bill Gates and Murdoch and all these other people, they would be thrilled at the way that this man has used his entrepreneurial skills and how he's gone there and earned all this money.

He's done a great job at doubling his master's money. Well, we see in verse 17, that one of the two talents did the same. But in verse 18, we see there that one had received the one talent, went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

He buries it. We'll find out the reason why in a moment. Well, the master returns in verse 19 and it's time to settle accounts. It's time to see how his money's being used.

But note there that it's been a long time. This picks up the parable before in the long time coming of the bridegroom. Again, Jesus is here helping his disciples just understand that there will be a long delay.

[10:15] But the master does come back. Time to settle accounts. Well, in verse 20, we see there that the first one comes in and he says, oh, look, you've given me, master, you handed over to me five talents.

See, I have made five more talents. The master's response in verse 21, well done, good and trustworthy slave. You've been trustworthy in a few things.

I'll put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master. The first servant was faithful. He used the money well.

And so he has given two things, increased responsibility and a share in the master's joy. Well, as we read there in verses 22 and 23, the second servant does the same.

And again, in verse 23, well done, good and trustworthy slave. You have been trustworthy in a few things. I'll put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master. Two faithful servants.

[11:16] But in verse 24, the wicked servant comes in. He comes in with his single talent in his hand and he comes before his master.

Master, I knew you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not scatter seed. So I was afraid and I went and hid your talent in the ground.

Here you have what is yours. The wicked servant comes in. You see, this wicked servant has a misconception about his master.

He thinks his master is a harsh man, a man who takes what he did not sow, a man who exploits his servants and there seems to be little gain for this man at the end.

And so because he has no love for the master, he misunderstands his master. He becomes alienated from him. He mistrusts him and he becomes a personal sloth.

[12:16] This wicked servant is lazy. He misunderstands the nature of his master and so he does not put the money to use.

In verses 26 and 27, the master responds to it. You wicked and lazy slave. You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow.

You gather and gather where I did not scatter. Then you ought to have invested my money with bankers and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. He makes the point there in verse 27, if you knew that about me, if you think that's the way that I am, why didn't you at least then go and put it into a bank and earn some interest?

If that's the way I am, why didn't you even do that? But no, he is so lazy and so wicked he doesn't even do that. So in verse 28, we see the results of what happened.

Take the talent from him. Give it to the one with ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given and they will have an abundance. But from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.

[13:25] As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This wicked and worthless slave who was lazy failed to use what was given to him, entrusted to him.

What happens to him? Great loss. Loss of the little that he had, rejection by the master, banishment from his presence and finally we have this picture of tears and gnashing of teeth.

A picture of great sadness and hardship. Well, Jesus teaches this parable to his disciples, warning that they need to be watchful for when Christ returns, but in that watchfulness not to become lazy, but to use their gifts and talents.

Well, let's try and reflect a little bit further on this parable. Try and tease out some of the things that it means for both the disciples then and for us now. It seems to me there are three things that we need to really think hard upon.

The first is we need to understand the times that we are living in. We need to understand these last days, the days before Christ's return.

[14:43] You see, it's very easy to sit here now and think, well, if the kingdom has already started and we've got the great significant moment in Jesus' death and resurrection, why the 2,000 years now? Why are we waiting here?

What's going on? The picture is, the Bible tells us, that these 2,000 years are a part of God's mercy, that people like yourselves and myself might be a part of God's mercy, that we might find salvation in Jesus, turn to him and be saved.

God in his mercy allows the sun to come up each day, just one more day, so that more may enter his kingdom. Jesus, in his parable, tells them to understand the nature of these days.

We need to remind ourselves that we are in the last days. Christ will come again. These are the days of mercy where people can enter God's kingdom. Therefore, we ought to be prepared for them, as we saw last week.

We ought to be prepared for Christ's coming. We ought not to be easily fooled by these days and slip away, be distracted by the world's distractions. We need to be reminded constantly from God's word and from each other that we do live in these last days, spurring each other on, reminding ourselves that each of us will have to face judgment day.

[16:09] Therefore, let us remind ourselves. Let us live in light of the fact that we are in these last days. Let us allow that to motivate us in the way that we use our gifts, that we tell our neighbours and we tell others of Christ.

Let us be mindful of God's teaching of these last days. That's the first thing, understanding our times.

The second thing that I think this parable teaches both the disciples and us is that we ought to know our Heavenly Father. You see, the wicked slave in here made the big mistake of not understanding his Master.

For him, he thought his Master was exploitive, that his Master was someone who had treated his slaves hard, that he gave very little reward. The wicked slave misunderstood his Master.

And I think for us, the Church and for our world, we do the same. It's interesting seeing the changes in our society, seeing that we do live in a spiritual world where so many people do see that they understand there is something out there, there is a God.

[17:32] But what we do is we turn that God into something that is palatable for ourselves, something that we can swallow, something that we can control, something that suits us. And so we misunderstand the true and living God.

We make him into the God that we want him to be. We ought not to be like the wicked slave. We ought to be people who understand and perceive correctly God's character, his activities and his goals for us.

We ought to be people who are reading God's word. We ought to be listening to him carefully. We ought to be coming to church regularly that we might understand more of this great God, more of his love, more of his mercy, more of his salvation, more of his jealousy for us, more of his wrath against sin.

We ought to understand more of this God, that we ought to have a correct view, a view that determines our behaviour. Because if we understood God rightly, that would surely impinge upon how we live our lives.

So therefore, my second encouragement is understand the nature of these last days. Understand the true and living God. But thirdly, in light of these two things, don't waste your life.

[18:57] Use the gifts and talents that God has given you for the sake of the kingdom. Many commentators over time have looked at this parable and tried to narrowly define what gifts and talents are for the readers now.

They say that perhaps it's just the spiritual gifts that are speaking about here. It's only just talking about money or perhaps it's only really referring to the leaders of the church. That's who the parable is referring to.

But I think it's much broader. What God has in mind here, I think, is it's not just the leaders but for everyone in God's, for those who are in God's kingdom.

That we ought to use every one of our gifts and talents, our money, our time, our spiritual gifts that God has given us. We ought to be investing all these gifts and endowments that God has given us for the sake of the kingdom.

We ought to be people who reflect the fact that we love and trust our Lord Jesus. That we show the fruit of this love and trust.

[20:07] That we are people who are industrious. That we use them wisely, our gifts and talents. That we are entrepreneurial. That we work hard with what we've got for the sake of the kingdom.

Not all of us have the same gifts. Not all of us have the same talents. But we all can be productive in what we have in our own unique way.

Let's just consider a few things just for a moment or two. What about our money? I know we've spoken about money in recent times but it seems to me that the words that have been written down for us in the Bible and the New Testament, Jesus' words, 15% that have been recorded for us, reflect Jesus' teaching on money and lifestyle.

That's more than Jesus speaks about heaven and hell put together. Therefore, Jesus thinks that the way that we use our money is important. So how do you use your money?

Are you like the woman who comes in and drops in two small coins, her only coins, into the box?

Are we people who live hazardlessly, giving liberally, giving all that we can?

[21 : 26] Do the way that we use our money show that God is our treasure, not possessions? My encouragement, think about it. How is it that we are using our money? Are we using it for ourselves?

Are we using it for God's kingdom? What about all the other things? What about how we watch TV, sport, gardening, hobby, clothes? These aren't bad things, but are we putting them to use for the sake of the kingdom of God?

How are we using our gifts and talents? What about our jobs? Are we being salt and light in our jobs?

Are we recognising that the money that we can earn helps in partnership with the gospel?

Are we witnessing there? Are we recognising that work is not a curse but something that God has given us that we might use for the sake of the kingdom? What about the gifts that you have that you can use to serve one another here in church?

Perhaps you're thinking of how you could use your gifts on a full-time basis. It's been greatly encouraging to see so many go on short-term missions. Ought we to be thinking about these things?

[22 : 42] Well, God has given us our gifts and our talents. We ought to be people who are passionate for God, joyfully displaying His supreme excellency in all our lives, in every area of our life.

We ought not to get to the end of our lives and think, what a wasted life, what a wasted passion.

You see, I look around and there are so many people who are spending their lives on trivial diversions, living for comfort and pleasure, perhaps even trying to avoid sin instead of actually being people who don't waste their lives, of people who live and die boasting in the cross of Christ and making the glory of God our single passion.

We ought to be people not to waste our lives, our time and our energy. In the Reader's Digest, the February edition of 1998, there was a, it talks of, it tells a story of a couple who took their retirement, an early retirement.

He was 59 and she was 51. They moved to Florida. They got themselves a 30 foot cruiser and they would just cruise around on their boat.

They'd play a bit of softball but then they'd spend most of their time collecting shells, just collecting shells. That's what they did for their retirement. Picture them on the last day before Christ, Judgment Day.

[24 : 15] Look Lord, look at our shells. Aren't they just so beautiful? What a tragedy.

What a wasted life. Only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last.

Amen.