

Share your Talents

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[0:00] Good morning, church. It's good to see you. For those of you who don't know me, my name is John French, and I'm on the team as Director of Missions. Here's the thing.

If you're a believer in Jesus like me, we have come to an understanding, the realisation that we belong to Jesus. And as we follow Jesus and listen to Jesus, our life can never be the same again. We can never think like an unbeliever again. Our perspective on the world has changed. And the motivation of our heart has been altered. What was once important, career, success, financial security, social standing, accumulation of material delights and worldly pleasures have been surpassed by the hope and joy we have in Christ.

As we've been called by Jesus, he told us there'll come a day when we're going to meet him in person and give an account for how we've lived our lives.

We know this meeting with Jesus will take place, so that gives us clarity and sheds light on everything we do now and everything in this world. In these closing chapters of Matthew's gospel, we discover what's important in the time that we have right now until we meet Jesus face to face.

[1:52] And I guess they're summarised most powerfully in the last three verses of Matthew 28, where he says, Go, make disciples of many nations. I have the authority and I'm tasking you to make disciples and I promise as you do that, I'll be with you always to the very end of the age.

And this doesn't mean that we drop out of society and become all weird. It just means that in living our normal life, we won't let disciple making drop away.

It will have priority. And we know that the priorities that Jesus has given us are right because he's moving himself to the cross. And he's going to the cross because that's the only way a person can become a disciple, by having their sins paid for.

And then that friendship with God can take place. And we know that these are the priorities because the great topics of Jesus, the cross, resurrection and return.

Everybody knows life is temporary in this world, but any Christian knows that we're on a temporary assignment. The non-Christian doesn't understand the temporary assignment from Jesus.

[3:09] So the only question that is being asked of the person who doesn't yet know Jesus is, what will I do with this short time I have? What's my obligation to myself and to my family?

And for those who are able to accumulate masses of time and masses of resources, it goes something like this. How do I finish off my bucket list?

How do I read those top 100 books or go to those top 100 sites that are all around the world on the World Heritage List? Visit those sites and travel.

Or the top 100 films. Pack it all in. And basically my gifts and talents, I'm going to use on myself in this limited time. But the Christian can't fall into that because that could well cut across the task of our temporary assignment, which is to be available and to make disciples.

And we know that everything hinges on listening very carefully to what Jesus has told us. Is he going to die on the cross? Well, that's going to be the key to forgiveness.

[4:20] Is he going to rise from the grave? Well, that's going to be proof that there's a future. Is he going to return? Well, that means we're going to be held accountable.

And so while we await Jesus' return, we must in some way be productive and responsible. We're going to have to give an account for how we have lived our lives.

Today's parable is about a man who gives resources to three servants. Two of them are faithful. One is not. There's three of these master-servant type parables in the New Testament.

There's one in Matthew 20, which is about a master who pays his workers an equal wage, whether they come at eight in the morning or midday or five in the afternoon, they all get the same pay to harvest the crop.

And this doesn't seem fair, but it's teaching us grace is freely given whatever time or age people turn to Christ, whether it's earlier or later in life.

[5 : 24] Then there's another parable, which is a kind of bombshell aimed at the Jewish unbelief. It's recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and it's the parable where the Jesus sends the workers into the vineyard to get some produce, and then a messenger comes to send some of that to the master, and they don't listen to those messengers.

They beat them up, and eventually he says, well, I'll send my son. They'll respect my son. But they don't. They kill the son. And Jesus, of course, is using this to expose the reaction of the Jewish people to their own Messiah.

But this third master-servant parable is the one we're looking at today, Matthew 25, and there's also a version of this in Luke 19. This is the parable where a master is giving out some resources to his servants.

And this is the only parable where the master gives different resources to different servants. So five to one, two to another, and one to one. And this is the only parable where the response to whether you've been faithful or unfaithful is so extreme.

So I want to ask four questions this morning. What is faithfulness? What is the reward? What is unfaithfulness? What is faithfulness? And what is the punishment? So what is faithfulness?

[6 : 44] That's our first question. Matthew 25, verses 14 to 15. A man's on a journey. So obviously, Jesus.

He's leaving, and he trusts property to the three servants. He gives them resources of varying portions. We heard bags of gold this morning, but often it's translated talents.

Talent is the word we would normally use for abilities or gifts or skills. The word talent here, gold bags, was talent, is a currency word, and it's a large sum.

And people have tried to make estimates of how much that was back in those days compared to today. And there's variants ranging from one talent being \$500,000, half a million dollars, all the way through to something like \$2.6 million.

So one talent was an extraordinary large amount of money. One got five, one got two, one got one. It doesn't just mean they've been given one, two or five abilities.

[7 : 45] But if we were to work out what this means for us today in this parable, it's everything that we've been given by God. Our resources, our abilities, our opportunities.

What do you have which is God's gift to you? The brain you've got, the gifts you've got, the resources, the skill set, the plenty, or maybe the not so much.

Whatever the Lord has given to you, we might summarise these as the talents or the gold to be used in God's service. Servant 1, verse 16, has obviously been very faithful and keen.

Servant 2, verse 17, seems to do the same. Servant number 3, buries the talent in the ground. And it was common practice to bury treasure in the ground, kind of like a cheap bank.

So burying it in the ground was a kind of way of keeping it safe but not doing anything with it. Before we see the challenge this parable finishes with and we need to face that challenge, I want us to notice the inspirational first 10 verses from 14 to 23 of chapter 25.

[8 : 58] I want us to be encouraged by the first two men who are given all they need to be faithful. They're not shortchanged. They're not sent out to do something which is too difficult.

The master doesn't ask impossible things of his people. He doesn't ask us to produce rabbits out of hats or to create success. Jesus doesn't say, I'm sending you off with nothing and I want you to produce masses.

These men simply use what they have. There's no instant success. It's not fast. It seems to take the whole of their life because the master is away for a long time.

Verse 19, And the five produce five and the two produce two. And the response from the master is as good as you could hope for. He looks at his servants and I think this is one of the most valued things you could hope to hear for from the scriptures.

He says, Well done, good and faithful servant. Don't you want to hear that? He says the same thing to the man who had five and the man who had two.

[10 : 13] So I want us to be reminded, those of you, and this is most of us, who serve the Lord at home, in work, just in our normal life, in church, where nobody gets what you do and nobody even sees what you do and nobody appreciates what you do, nobody understands what you're doing, but you're seeking to put God's word into practice, this sentence from Jesus is going to totally

compensate.

Well done, good and faithful servant. You've used your talents for God's glory. Let me think of Matthew chapter 6 where Jesus says, Use your treasures on earth to build treasures in heaven and that's not cruising around in the rolls in heaven, it's other people.

You can say, Hey, you're here. I pointed you to Jesus and Jesus used me and your heart was opened by God but as we plant seeds in others' water, God causes the growth.

Treasure is making disciples. I'm not going to say it's going to be easy as we wait to hear that sentence from Jesus, Well done, good and faithful servant. I'm not saying we shouldn't encourage one another along the way.

Let's encourage each other. I'm saying these words from Jesus will outweigh every cost and every struggle in the end. What we see here is the Master is a great and gracious Master.

[11:43] He gives abundant resources. He simply asks for willing service. Not superhuman service. But the sort of service that says, I would like to use what God's given me.

And you will discover that God is thrilled by such faithfulness. So faithfulness here means that you're looking at what he's given you and you're working out how you might use it for God's glory, doing what he's asked to do.

Listening to what he asks us. Especially those last three verses of Matthew 28. where we get our commission to make disciples and use every opportunity we have in the time we have left to treasure Jesus for God's glory and the joy of all people.

when you're getting your hair cut, when you're buying a coffee, when you're sitting on a bus next to someone. I caught a cab this morning. I chatted with the guy about Jesus.

Last Thursday night, sorry, the Thursday before, I was at a dinner for my son's Year 12 cadet graduation. I sat next to someone and I talked about Jesus.

[12:53] I shared something from EE. We've been doing Evangelism Explored recently. And in EE, one of the things is, oh, all good people go to heaven, don't they? And you talk about an omelette and you make eggs.

And as you put the eggs in, love, joy, peace, good eggs, and you get a rotten egg. And you whip it up and you've now got the rotten egg in there and you serve that up. Would you eat an omelette made with a rotten egg? No, we can't.

That one bad egg in us, we can't serve that up to God. I got to share this with this person who had a background, a religious background, and she said, that's given me food for thought. I need to think more about this. We'd be praying for her.

Every opportunity. So what's the reward? That's the second question. We can't push all the details in the parable too far, but we see in verses 21 and 23 that the reward means commendation.

Well done. It means greater usefulness. You've been good in a few things. I'll now ask you for many things. And thirdly, come and enter the happiness.

[13:54] So those three things are the reward in the parable. The commendation of Jesus, the immeasurable approval is all that matters. And if we focus on Jesus' approval alone, it will free us from any worldly dangers and disappointments and distractions.

It can be a hard lesson to keep going and wait for that well done faithful servant on the last day. But look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

The commendation of Jesus is worth waiting for. I sometimes do visualisations and Jesus doesn't ask us to walk on water. But I do know that Peter walked on water because he focused on Jesus. Now again, he's not asking us to walk on water but he's saying step out of the comfort of the boat. Whatever you're building around yourself is a security buffer. Step out of that and focus on Jesus. And when Peter stepped out of the boat and focused on Jesus, he walked. But what happened when he got distracted? He took his eyes off Jesus and he felt overwhelmed. And so I've been doing this visualisation recently of I'm stepping out of the boat, I'm walking, I'm focused on Jesus and as I, anxieties and fears and worries in the world I get distracted and I've almost made it like I surf.

[15:12] I've almost made it like a barrel. So Jesus is there and I'm focused on him and I'm being buffered on either side and there's this barrel of wave and this move away all these things.

And they're distracting me but I'm going to focus on Jesus and I'm going to stay in the barrel and just keep focusing on Jesus. It's worth it.

That's my visualisation but I mean you can go there or not. The second thing in the reward is greater usefulness. As we focus on Jesus verses 21-23 you've been faithful in a few things I will entrust you now with many things.

It's ironic that the man who's been given the most is told he's done well with a few things. What could be the reward if we've already received so much is to actually receive many things. Luke says the equivalent in his parable in chapter 19 of Luke's gospel you've done well with some coins now I'm going to give you some cities. This is almost as though the master has gone crazy with reward and affection.

[16:14] We need to remember that our master is incredibly generous and I'm telling you this because when we come to the third servant if you've got bad views of the master it will affect every decision badly.

The third part of the reward is that we're invited to share the master's happiness. The Greek here says enter the joy of your master. This could mean enter a joyful place but it may well mean I want you to enter into my joy and rejoice as I rejoice.

I want you to experience what I experience I want you to know what perfect joy is. That's amazing. Who is the happiest person in the universe?

It's God. Not because he's careless about suffering and sadness these things grieve him dreadfully but he knows exactly what he's doing and nothing gets in his way and he wants us to share in his joy.

Tragically when people look away from Christ to get their joy and their happiness the idea that if I just collect and accumulate and get lots of money and I spend it on myself and gain personal recognition then I'll be satisfied.

[17:25] Never satisfies never fills that void. Maybe temporarily but the long term effect of accumulating and hoarding and holding and not releasing is deep dissatisfaction.

Even more seriously self-preoccupation and the inability to serve or sacrifice for someone else. When we're preoccupied with financial security then we're no different than the secular world. When money rules the day ethical decisions become economic decisions and when ethical decisions become economic decisions we're really in trouble as individuals and a community. We've been made for Christ.

It's fellowship with Jesus which will give us deep peace and joy. There's no peace like his peace. There's no joy like his joy and his reward is immeasurable. So thirdly what is unfaithfulness?

I heard a story of a couple who were asleep in bed and the phone rang. This is one of the old landlines and the lady reached over and picked up at the receiver and after a few seconds she said well I don't know.

[18:36] We live 90 kilometres away. She put the phone down husband asked who was that? She said I don't know. Some lady was asking if the coast was clear.

That's unfaithfulness. What drives unfaithfulness? In Matthew 25 verse 24 we notice that the servant has got a problem with the master. He says you're a hard man.

You don't sow but you expect to harvest. You don't scatter but you expect to gather. Well in the face of your hardness I hid from fear what you'd given me. Now we have to ask here where does this kind of thinking come from?

To think that God is a ruthless tyrant. It sounds like Genesis 3 where the serpent sews the idea into the man and the woman's head that this God who gives the whole of the garden with all the trees and all the beauty and all the perfection is somehow holding out on them.

He's a cruel tyrant. When you begin to think of God like that it affects the way you behave and it's completely different from the biblical picture. If you find yourself unbalanced in this area I suggest get back into your Bible and collect every verse you possibly can to even out and perfect your proper doctrine of God.

[20:00] Psalm 103 verse 8 comes to mind the Lord is merciful and gracious slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. That's the God of the Bible.

There's something very disturbing going on here where this servant says to the master you're a bit of a tyrant. The master of course doesn't agree. Verses 26 and 27 he says look even if it were true wouldn't I have been better if you thought logically?

In other words if you're telling the truth that I am a tyrant wouldn't it have been better for you to just bank the money and at least got some interest? Something would have come in. But the servant

here is speaking very presumptuously and the problem is not the master.

The master gives everything that people could need as it does not take or squeeze or treat unfairly. The fatal sentence if you look at verse 26 is where the master lifts the lid on the servant and sees right through this idea of fear and strips away the excuses and he says in very disturbing language that the servant is wicked and lazy.

The problem is not the master the problem is the servant. If we live in fear we won't even begin to tap into our God-given potential. Instead we'll act like this unfaithful servant who decided that buying burying his talents was a safer course of action than investing in for the benefit of the master.

[21:37] According to Jesus taking this approach to life is not just being cautious it's being evil and lazy. There's a common cartoon depiction of God the Simpsons do it a lot where God wants to smite you with a lightning bolt if you step one step out of place.

God the cosmic cop spoil sport a killjoy a tyrant. The fact of the matter is God is not a looming tyrant he's a gracious heavenly father who can see through our excuses.

One commentator says his third servant has the philosophy play it safe. and I suppose some people play it safe. They say I don't want to get hurt.

I don't want to be insulted if I share my faith. I don't want people to think badly of me. I'm going to bury everything. I'm just going to keep quiet. I don't want to cause harm.

I'm going to be a secret disciple. Nowhere in the scriptures are we encouraged to keep it to ourself to have just our own personal faith.

[22:48] Not bearing your responsibility according to this parable conducting your Christianity as a private thing being an invisible member of Christ's fellowship coasting travelling being a passenger refusing to do what God asked you to do will be exposed.

I fear for people who think they're getting away with it because it's just impossible on the last day.

So let's think about the punishment. It's the fourth question. What's the punishment?

It looks excessive in verses 28 to 30. The gifts are taken away and the servant is sent away into the darkness which is code in the rest of Matthew for hell.

And you wonder whether the servant has really been over punished and whether he's even lost his salvation. I think the probable answer is this man never had salvation.

He's had a whole life to respond to the master but he's chosen to refuse and reject the master for the whole of his life and now his time is gone. He's obviously treated the master as an enemy and refused to serve him.

[24:00] I think this sounds like an unbeliever. Being exposed to what he really is. The man has wanted to distance himself from the master and run his own life and forget about what he's obligated to do or think and now he's getting his wish full blown.

He's completely distanced from God. C.S. Lewis puts it like this. If you stand outside the door of the kingdom and you're invited in and you say no and you're invited in and you say no and you're invited in and you say no and then the door closes and you find yourself outside.

You can't be surprised if you're outside. Of course we deserve this treatment. We've treated God badly. We viewed him badly.

Our rebellion deserves the casting away but we can't read the word darkness without remembering that somebody else has experienced darkness for us. The one reason that we can be at peace and can keep going forward with joy, the one reason we can be glad about forgiveness and the future in front of us is because this person, Jesus, voluntarily went into the darkness and acted like he was a rebellious servant for us so that we might be treated as utterly faithful servants.

It's incredible. But what took place at the cross when Jesus went through the crucifixion was that he took all the darkness that a rebellious servant like you and I deserve.

[25:32] He took it all. He dealt with it and consumed it. And he gives us the status of servants, sons and daughters. And the huge privilege of serving a heavenly father with the talents and resources that he's given each of us, all in different portions and different measure, and in the strength that he provides and gives for the number of days that he's given us, is that there'll be a reward at the end that far outweighs everything.

Come, good and faithful servant. So what's your next step? God is calling you. Think about what you do well.

Consider what tasks or roles come easily to you. Think about what you excel in. Consider your strengths and interests. We're all different. God has widest, though, for his glory.

We've all got natural talents and spiritual gifts and earthly treasures, all allocated in different portions. Some more, some less, but we're all equipped. Don't compare yourself to others.

We're all given different portions. I find myself sometimes thinking, Billy Graham, why didn't you give me that portion, God? But he was given that portion. John Dixon, prolific book writer, an apologist.

[26 : 55] I wasn't given that portion. I've been given this portion. Some have been given five, some have been given two, some have been given one. Do people even know at your workplace that you're a Christian?

Do people know in your life that you're a Christian, that you're here right now? The main lesson we learn from the parable of talents is that we must not bury what God has given us. There is literally no place for a quiet, private, personal faith.

And the talents aren't for us to use on ourselves. Rather, we're to use the talents we've been given to grow God's kingdom and make disciples. Put simply, the Lord has given to every believer in this building gifts and resources and abilities and opportunities and the key is to be willing to share your talents and to say, Lord, here's the day you've given me and here's the gifts and grace you've given me.

How can I be useful today? give me strength to step out in faith. Because the way we live our lives will say a lot about the way we see our master.

So let's go out this day and use our talents for God's glory as we treasure Jesus for the joy of all people. Amen.