

The Stewardship of Our Talents

An Expository Sermon

by C. W. Bradley

(Read Matthew 25:14-20.)

It is evident that the word *talent* in this parable represents an amount of money. I have read that it was approximately one thousand dollars in our money. Over the years, however, the word has come to be used in a broader sense. It now refers to any ability or abilities a person may have. Today we say, "He is a very talented person." We know what that expression means. Nobody questions what we mean when we use the word *talent* in this larger sense. It is in this broader sense that I am using the word in this sermon. When I speak of the stewardship of our talents, I am not talking about just money. I am talking about all our abilities, all our gifts from God.

We are stewards of whatever abilities we have. They were given to us from God. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:7, "For who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Where did you get your talents and abilities? You did not make yourself. I hope you are developing your talents, but you did not create them. God gave them to you. In James 1:17 we are told that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father." God has let us use our talents for a little while. Thus all of our abilities belong to Him and should be used to His glory. Whatever your talents or abilities, use them to give glory to God.

The parable of the talents contains three truths about our talents that I want you to see.

I. THE DISTRIBUTION OF TALENTS

Observe, first of all, the distribution of the talents. All of the men in the story were servants. They did not deserve anything. The master simply bestowed certain gifts upon them. All of them received something. And so it is with us. I don't care who you are. I don't care what your background may be. Let me assure you that God did not make you totally destitute. Even the least talented have something. I challenge you to ex-

amine your life honestly, neither magnifying your abilities nor minimizing them. What are your abilities? What has God given to you? Maybe He has not given you as much as He has given someone else, but He has given you something.

In this parable we see that the servants did not receive the same amount of gifts. All the servants received something, but they did not receive the same amount. They were not all capable of handling the same amount. Isn't it interesting that no two people on earth are identical. There are no two fingerprints that are identical. This is one of the many proofs which show that we didn't just come about by accident. There is a supreme designer. How can there be so many millions of people, so many millions of hands, and yet no two fingerprints that are identical. Each person is unique.

God created each person different from the other. Abraham Lincoln said, "We are born equal." In one sense we are, but there is another sense in which this is untrue. Some are born with strong, healthy bodies and some with sickly bodies. Some are born with handsome physiques and others are not very handsome at all. Some are born with good minds and others with slower minds. God made us all different, and yet He gave to each one of us some kind of ability.

Not only do we differ in our birth, but we also differ in our opportunities for the development of our talents. Some are born in situations where they are given the very best training for the development of their talents. They receive the finest education that is available. Many are blessed by being in a spiritual environment, and others are not. Think of those thousands of little children right in our own communities who have never been privileged to attend a Bible class and would not know what the Bible is if they saw a copy. They have never heard their mothers and daddies say anything about spiritual development. Don't tell me they have the same opportunities as our children. They don't. The opportu-

nity for the development of their talents is very different.

But not only do we differ in our birth, surroundings, and opportunities for the development of our talents, but we also differ in the opportunities for the use of our talents. When I was a young boy on the farm in middle Tennessee, we had a piece of rich bottom land. The creek overflowed every spring and left a rich deposit of soil there. It was easy to make good corn on that land. We did not have to work too hard to produce a good crop of corn every year on that piece of bottom land. But back on the ridge on the other side of our house, was a rough, rocky field. We worked it too. We worked harder there than we did in the bottom land, and it didn't produce as much. Those were two different fields. Two people may in many ways have equal talents, but one may be placed in one area and the other in a much more difficult area. Two preachers may have equal talents but may be placed in very different fields of labor. One may look like he is producing far more than the other when it may be that they differ significantly in their opportunities for the use of their talents. If they were to switch places, some big changes might be seen in what each could do.

Yes, God has given us all some talents, but He did not give us the same amount or the same talents. Remember Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:7, "For who maketh thee to differ? . . ." We see this sometimes even in physical differences. A woman may be very beautiful, and yet her haughtiness may ruin her. She may gloat over her own beauty. Who made her that way? Why should she be puffed up and haughty? A homely-looking person shouldn't feel worthless. God made the homely as well as the beautiful. Use what you have. Who made you to differ? What do you have that was not given to you? Paul continued, ". . . why doest thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). There is no basis for glorying whatsoever.

II. THE DEDICATION OF OUR TALENTS TO GOD

Let us look now at the importance of using our talents in God's service. It is not what we have. Oh, no. It is how we are using what we have. It is not how long we live. It is how we live. That is the important factor with God. We are not

blessed simply because we possess great talent. We are blessed when we dedicate our talent to God. I have known people just like the one talent man. They have not done anything with their talents. We are blessed when we use what we have.

It is easy for the more gifted to become satisfied with far less than they are capable of giving. We sometimes look upon that highly gifted person and say, "My, he never has any temptations." Oh, yes, he does. His temptation is to become satisfied with mediocrity. The person with the high I.Q. has strong temptations; he may not develop his mind. In college I roomed for a few months with a boy who was very intelligent. While I would be sitting at my desk studying, slaving away, he would be sitting over on his bed daydreaming. He would jump up and say, "I've just made a million dollars!" I would say, "Really? How?" He would say, "I've made it by growing chickens." He had figured out that if he would purchase so many thousands of chickens at so much per chicken, grow them to be a certain weight, and get so much per pound for them, he would make a million dollars. What was he doing? He was dreaming. He had great talent, but he did not use it very much.

I am thinking of the young men at David Lipscomb College when I was in college who were talented speakers. I don't know where they are today. Most of them aren't preaching. I had to fight not to envy them when they would make chapel talks. What happened to them? I don't know. They had high I.Q.'s and great speaking abilities, but they didn't use them.

Here is a man who has great wealth. He may give more than anybody else, but he may say, "Look, I am giving more than anyone else in this congregation." He may be satisfied with his giving, though he is giving far less than he is capable of giving. You see, the highly gifted are tempted too.

On the other hand, it is easy for the less gifted to feel worthless and say, "I'm not needed. I can do so little. I won't even be missed if I am not there." He says, "My small contribution would not be missed. I can give only a few dollars. Nobody will miss that much. I don't even count." You see, the less gifted would be prone to give up and not do anything because he can't do a great work.

Look at the one talent man in the story. He said, "I was afraid." "Why were you afraid, sir?" we ask. He says, "I was afraid that I could not do as well as those other men. I was afraid that my pride would be wounded." "What else were you afraid of?" we ask. He says, "Well, I was afraid of my lord. I thought he was a hard master. Maybe he would demand more than I am capable of doing."

Milton, the blind poet, grappled over this. He wondered, "I'm blind. Will God judge me on the same basis as He will a person who can see? Will He expect me to do as much as those who can see?" He asked, "Does God exact day labor, sight being denied?" He finally concluded, "No! God won't hold me responsible for what I cannot do." Oh, that we might come to see this truth. What are you doing with whatever God gave you? Are you being a good steward of your talent, whatever it is?

III. THE DAY OF RECKONING

This parable also pictures a day of reckoning. After a long time, the lord came back and called his servants in for a reckoning. You can mark it down that a day of reckoning is coming for all of us too. That day is certain. Acts 17:31 says that God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness. In Romans 14:12 Paul says, "Each one of us shall give account of himself to God." We will not stand before God as a congregation. The three men in our story were not called up as a group and asked, "How much did all of you together produce?" They could have made a very good showing if that had been the way they were judged. Each one had to tell what he had done. That is the way it will be with all of us. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "We must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done."

Notice the basis on which the lord judged the two successful men. The lord in the parable did not say, "Thou hast been clever." He did not say, "Thou hast been flawless." He did not say, "Thou hast been successful." He said, "Thou hast been faithful." I am glad that is what he said. Revelation 2:10 says, "Be thou faithful unto death." 1 Corinthians 4:2 says, "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." Faithfulness is all that God asks of any steward. Jesus said in

Luke 16:10, "He that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much: and he that is unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous also in much."

What talents do you have? You say, "I don't have much talent." But what are you doing with what you have? You may not be able to stand before a class and fluently speak and teach. You may not be a good song leader. You may not even be able to sit down with someone and very effectively turn from one Scripture to another, but you may be able to go into somebody's house and help when someone is sick. You may be able to put a hand on somebody's shoulder and give him encouragement. You may be able to smile at someone who is downhearted. You may be able to give a consoling word to somebody whose heart is broken. He that is faithful in little will be faithful in much.

Note what the lord said to the one talent man: "Thou wicked and slothful servant." Wicked? He had not been a real bad, mean person, had he? Yet the lord called him wicked. Why? Do you mean God considers a person wicked simply because he does not use what he has? That is exactly what the parable teaches. You do not have to rob a bank to be wicked. You do not have to commit adultery to be wicked. You do not have to steal a car to be wicked. Just don't use what you have. Just bury your talent. And God will call you wicked.

Notice what else he said: "Take away that which he has!" Here is a principle of God, a principle of life. You either use it or lose it. A man says, "I don't know what is wrong with me. I can't seem to remember like I once did. At one time I could just stand up and teach a class. I don't seem to be able to do it anymore." How long has it been since he has tried it? When you stop using it, you start losing it. Whatever it is, either use it or lose it. That is a law.

CONCLUSION

What are you doing with your talents? Are we honest enough to examine our lives? How many of us are saying, "I don't have any talents." Yes, we do; we all do. God gave us all gifts. What are you doing with yours? Are you using them for the glory of God? What if you were to stand before your Lord today? Would He say, "Well done, good and faithful servant"?

Of course, if you are not a Christian, you are

not glorifying God. I don't care how many talents you have. If you are not a Christian, you are not using them for God's glory. If you are not a faithful Christian, you are not using your talents for God's glory.

We are stewards of our talents. They belong to God. Our talents have been loaned to us for a brief period of time. Let us faithfully use our talents so that we may hear our Lord say on the last day, "Well done!"

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