

348 “he gave five talents”

In Matthew 25.14-30 the Lord tells a parable to His Jewish disciples which starts, “For [the kingdom of heaven] (implied, see verse 1) is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods” (25.14, KJV).

The wider context of this parable is the Lord’s detailed response to His disciples’ questioning about “the end times” (24.1-3), and follows on after “the fig tree” (24.32), “the goodman of the house” (24.43-51) and “the ten virgins” (25.1-13). The message of all these parables is simple for both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ – our need to be faithful and ready for His return.

We see in 25.14 that the man in the parable calls, in the Greek, his “doulos”, his slaves. We gather from a Greek Lexicon that such a term has nothing to do with the cruelty associated with the slavery of either the Israelites’ captivity in Egypt or that of more recent times. Rather it emphasises these men as being owned, in service, in subjection, and “given up wholly to the will of another”. That is quite a reminder, right at the start of this parable, of one part of our current status in the service of Christ! – though its starkness is counterbalanced by our also having in Christ the status of being loved, as friends, children and heirs of God (egs., John 15.9-15 / Romans 5.8-9 & 8.14-17,31-39). So perhaps our being “owned” and “in service” to such a Master is not so bad after all!

Next we notice that – “he delivered unto them his goods” (25.14b). The talents that the man gave to them were not outright gifts; they remained his property throughout, and his slaves were entrusted with them as stewards, with a day of reckoning to occur at a future date.

The goods that were given were “talents” of Roman currency - one slave receiving five, another two, and another, one. Now we know from a Bible Dictionary that a talent was worth 10,000 denarii, and that one denarii was roughly one day’s wages. If we say that a typical daily wage in Britain is now say, for the sake of example, £100, the man with five talents was being entrusted with 10,000 days’ wages at £100 per day, multiplied by five, which, via the pocket calculator, works out as £5 million in today’s money! Even the slave with just one talent was entrusted with £1 million of his master’s money.

Today the slaves in this story are people like us. All we can say in response to such figures is that the Owner of those talents is lavishly

rich, lavishly generous, and lavishly trusting - another pointer to the fact that He rates even us very highly!

But with that trust comes responsibility on our part. First we are to recognise the talents we are entrusted with, which are similar to the “spiritual gifts” mentioned for example in Romans 12.1-21, I Corinthians 12.4-11 and Ephesians 4.7-16. These talents give us no excuse for arrogance, competitiveness or cliqueness; nor for an “inferiority complex” or an opting-out if we feel we have “only” £1 million’s worth!

Secondly, the Lord expects us “to get on with it” – “for we are his (God the Father’s) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works ...” (Ephesians 2.10a, and eg., James 1.22-27). Using the other picture, those spiritual gifts are to produce spiritual fruit (eg., John 15.1-8 / Galatians 5.22-23).

How we put these talents to good, practical use will vary between us all, depending on the talents themselves, and on our characters, commitments and circumstances. We need to apply them prayerfully and sensibly under the Lord, avoiding the two errors of over-busyness or over-complacency. The only failure in this matter, as far as the Lord, the Owner of the talents, is concerned, involves our doing nothing at all, perhaps out of wilfulness, dithering or cowardice. No wonder such a slave turns out to be useless, so even the little that he has been entrusted with is given to the one with the proven track record (Matthew 25.24-30 / John 15.8).

Crucially, our salvation in Christ is not at stake over our use of these talents (egs., Romans 5.1-2 & 8.1 / II Corinthians 1.22 & 5.5 / Ephesians 1.13-14). Instead our “works” alone – that is, how effectively we have used our talents - will be judged before “the judgment seat of Christ” (egs., II Corinthians 5.10 / I Corinthians 3.12-15), resulting in appropriate reward or loss.

So we do well in our prayer times to allow the Lord to assess how we are using the talents He has entrusted to us, including our time and money. In our own strength we shall always be “unprofitable servants” in line for that “outer darkness” (Matthew 25.30), but instead, please God and by His grace, may each of us one day hear those precious words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant”.