

# “It’s Not How Many Talents You Have

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Matthew 25:14-30

Last Wednesday at Bible study we discussed some five-talent people. We made a list of them. You would not be surprised at some of the persons on the list; Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln. Einstein and Ghandi were others. As we discussed the list a little bit more, however, we decided that maybe a five-talent person would do even more. We talked about ol’ Ben Franklin. Remember, Ben Franklin contributed not only to the founding of our country but he was also an inventor. He did several other things.

I suggested the one person I could think of perhaps more than anyone else who was a five-talent person, Albert Schweitzer. You’ve heard the name, but you might not remember that originally he was a professor of philosophy. He went on to earn a medical degree. With his medical degree he went to Africa where he became a missionary. For his work in Africa he received the Nobel Prize. With the money he received from the Nobel Prize he built a hospital in Africa. Schweitzer was truly a five-talent kind of man.

Most of us, if we were asked, would say, “I’m just a one-talent person.” Now when we get in the shower and start singing we might think to ourselves, “Man, I’m a five-talent kind of guy,” but if we had to get up here in front of the sanctuary and sing in front of everyone else, we’d say, “I’ll pass on that. I’m just a one-talent kind of guy.”

Let me tell you about my favorite one-talent person—a little bitty woman. Remember Mother Teresa? She wasn’t a five-talent person. Her one talent was caring for others, but my goodness look what she did with just that one talent.

First lesson from the scripture is this; it’s not the number of talents you *have*, it’s what you *do* with those talents. There is another important lesson from the scripture. It is a lesson about expectations. In our story, the word talent does not refer to the word that we usually think of. When we think of the word talent, we think of gifts, abilities, or skills. In this scripture the word talent was a weight of measure. In those days, balanced scales were used and a talent was about 60 pounds. It could be used to measure just about anything—iron, more precious metals like silver or gold, or even grain. In this instance, Biblical scholars aren’t sure, but a talent was considered to be at least 15 years’ wages, maybe several million dollars.

Think about how much money that was in that day and age. Now think about how much *five* talents would have been.

The second lesson from the story is this. It's a lesson about expectations—about what God expects us to do with the talents that God gives to us. God expects us to use those talents. Do you remember the story of Jesus cursing the fig tree? If you read that story closely it seems harsh. We read in the scripture that it was not the season for figs. How could you expect a fig tree to produce figs when it was out of season . . . unless you are the one who created the tree? In other words, we are always supposed to be in season for God. We are always supposed to produce for God.

I came across a wonderful quote recently from Quincy Jones. Some of you will recognize that name. Quincy Jones is a well-known music producer and composer of music. He said he owed his work ethic to his father. This little saying is something his father taught him. All of us should probably post it somewhere, especially in every classroom in the country.

Once a task has just begun,  
Never leave it 'til it's done.  
Be the labor great or small,  
do it well or not at all.

Don't you love that? I believe that is what God expects of us with our lives. "Do it well or not at all." The one-talent guy in the story chose "not at all." That was his choice. He didn't realize who he was. I don't know how closely you listened to the story that Steve read this morning, but in that scripture Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "Your destiny is not wrath, but salvation. You are destined for salvation." One way we receive the gift of God is to share that gift.

Another lesson is the law of use it or lose it. If we don't use the talents God shares with us, something within us dies. Of course, this involves risk. Hear these words about the risk that is involved in living and loving:

"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket-safe, dark, motionless, airless place, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy is damnation. The only place outside

heave where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and risks of love is hell.” C.S. Lewis

This is a true story, and it’s a wonderful lesson about the nature of God. Two or three months ago I was out at St. Francis Hospital. I was waiting for the elevator. I spend a lot of time waiting for elevators in hospitals. I had barely noticed a couple off to the side, but while I was waiting for the elevator, the woman said, “Dr. Burkhalter?” I turned around and said, “No ma’am, I’m Dr. Wolfe.” Now that was a silly thing to say, wasn’t it, especially in a hospital. I guess if she had asked me some kind of technical medical question I would have said, “Oh, that’s so easy. Nurse, come over here and answer this lady’s question.” Keep that story in mind about Dr. Burkhalter. Just last week I went to visit someone in the hospital—a man who had visited our church. We had had a delightful evening with this man and a friend of his, and with another couple from the church at the Pummills’ home. That was the first time I had really had the opportunity to visit with the man, but someone asked me if I could go by and see him and I said I would be happy to do so. He was also at St. Francis. When I walked into his hospital room, he was asleep. That’s not uncommon. I have learned I can usually clear my throat or move a chair and the patient will wake up. I figure if they don’t, they need to sleep.

I cleared my throat and this man woke up. He said, “Hi,” and I said, “Hi, how are you feeling?” as I sat down beside him. He said, “I’m feeling great.” Then he said, “How am I doing?” He thought I was Dr. Burkhalter, I guess. I said, “I don’t know.” I’m just glad I didn’t get a worried look on my face and say, “Boy, I don’t know how you’re doing!” After he woke up, I reminded him who I was and where we had met.

He didn’t know who I was, just like the man in the scripture didn’t know the master. Do you remember that? He said, “I knew you to be a hard man.” Was that really the case? When I read the scripture, I didn’t read it the way I should have. The man said, “I knew you to be a hard man and I was afraid.” He probably said (in tiny, squeaky voice), “I knew you to be a hard man and I was afraid of you.” He thought his talent was fear, but that wasn’t his destiny.

I know people who are afraid of God. It breaks my heart when I see it. They believe God is a harsh God, just waiting for them to make some kind of mistake so God can whack ‘em, or whatever. They don’t know God. They don’t know the God of the scriptures. They don’t know the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

It is not our destiny to obtain the wrath of God. Our destiny is salvation, and a part of that salvation means that our destiny is to share the grace we have received. That is our talent. It's nothing we've earned. It's nothing we've done for ourselves. It is a gift from God, and it is our destiny, our responsibility, our duty, our privilege to share that grace.

Last week we read the story and scripture of the wise and foolish bridesmaids. In that story I said we find some of the saddest words in the Bible. Remember that story? The foolish bridesmaids are late. They knock on the door and they hear a voice from inside saying, "I don't know you. I don't know you." In today's scripture we find some of the best words in the entire Bible. Do you remember them? For the servants who have done well, for the servants who have lived their destinies to share, for the servants who realize it's not the number of talents you have, it's the number of talents you share, they heard these words from their master: "Enter into the joy of your master." May it be so for each of us. Amen.