

## THE PARABLES OF THE POUNDS AND TALENTS

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SCRIPTURE: Luke 19:11-27 with omissions

A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pound. And he said unto him, Well, thou good and faithful servant: Because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. (Then comes the report of the one who hid his pound, and had no increase) And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds .... Unto every one which hath shall be given, and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.

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Take heed therefore how ye hear, for whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have. (Luke 8:18)

Matthew's parable of the talents and Luke's parable of the pounds seem to be essentially the same parable, differently treated by two authors; and therefore we are considering them together in this sermon. Both are lessons in watchful waiting and in preparedness, as is the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins. In each the master is absent for an indeterminate time, leaving the servants to occupy until he returns. Luke says that Jesus told this parable because the Jews taught that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. Evidently Jesus wanted to plant the idea that the return of the Lord and the final reign of his kingdom might be delayed longer than either his followers or the Jews supposed.

In each parable the Lord went away into a far country. Luke adds an element which is not found in Matthew's account -- that the Lord went to receive a kingdom and return and that the citizens left behind in the first kingdom rebelled against him. This is symbolic of the rebellion of the citizens of this world against the King who has gone to receive a heavenly kingdom, but who some day will return to demand an accounting.

The first lesson to be learned from this parable is a lesson of stewardship. As the Lord prepared to depart, he called unto him his servants, and delivered unto them his goods. The question of who owned those goods does not enter into the story at any time. The Lord was the owner; the men were only temporary stewards over his property until he should return and claim it. So are we stewards over our material possessions which have been temporarily placed in our care and management, until the Lord returns to demand an accounting of us.

The second lesson to be gleaned from these two parables is that the gifts and responsibilities of this stewardship were given according to capacity -- "to every man according to his several ability." All men are created equal, in that all have equal rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; but in natural talents, in gifts, in capacities, they are not equal. God gives to some five talents, to some two talents, and to some one. Greater capacity brings greater gifts, and greater gifts bring greater responsibility. As Jesus says in another place, "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him will they ask the more."

The third lesson of these parables is a lesson of responsibility and diligence. All the servants were told by the Lord, "Occupy till I come." To occupy is to carry on in the same manner as the Lord would have done -- not merely to stand guard over what he had left. All the servants seemingly knew what was expected of them. Two of them "occupied" by increasing and enlarging and improving upon their stewardship. One merely guarded or kept safe his stewardship.

When the Lord returned to take a reckoning of his servants, and found that two of them had doubled the money he had left with them, there is significance in the fact that both received the same commendation, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, come into the joy of thy Lord," and that in spite of their different capacities, both entered into or shared equally in that joy. Both had done their best according to the measure of their gift, their opportunity, and their capacity. In the parable of the pounds, as told by Luke, -- a statement from Matthew's parable takes on a larger meaning "Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things," for in Luke parable the Lord gives the five talent man five cities as his new stewardship, and to the two talent man he gives two cities. Again the reward is according to capacity to receive, to appreciate, and to use.

When the one talent man came to be reckoned with, he thought he too had been a faithful servant. He had safely kept his one talent. He had conserved his master's wealth, but he had not increased it. "I feared thee" he said to his Lord, in a seeming attempt to make the Lord responsible for his own timidity. He had ventured nothing, gained nothing. He had allowed his master's money and resources to lie idle; he had been idle himself. Idleness is waste, and waste is wicked; therefore he was a wicked as well as a slothful servant; and because of his wickedness Luke says that he was cast into outer darkness.

"Unto every one which hath shall be given, and from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away from him." This seems like not only a hard saying, but an impossible one. How can he who has nothing have anything taken away from him? But in connection with the story which has gone before, the meaning is quite apparent. The one talent man has never really had his talent or his pound. It had passed through his possession, but it had been buried in the earth the whole time of the Lord's absence. Because he had never really had it, had never used it, it was taken away from him. We do not really have any talent, any gift, any blessing which cometh to us from God until we "occupy," until we have made it our own by using it to his glory and the service of others, and by this use produced a return. We can not be entrusted with many things until we have proved our abilities on fewer, smaller things. We can never hope to receive the true riches unless we have learned to be faithful in the affairs entrusted to us by Mammon.

It is an inviolable law of life and of the kingdom that the talent which is buried is lost. Let a concert pianist neglect his practice and his piano for a year, and much of his talent will be lost. The fish which in the blackness of Mammoth cave had no need to use their eyes, have lost their eyesight. The muscle or organ which is not used soon loses its powers. This is the negative side of the picture. The other side is that when any talent is used, it is developed by use. Muscles and organs of the body can be trained to do fantastic feats of strength and skill by long continued practice and use. There are latent, unexplored talents within each one of us -- buried and unknown -- because we have never had the faith or the courage to use them and increase them.

The last lesson to be gained from the two parables of the talents and the pounds is the lesson that we must live our lives in courageous faith. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. We must do more than merely guard the talents which have been given to us, for fear that they may be lost in action or tarnished and battered by use. Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it fall into the ground and die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He who risks and loses his life in service will find his potentialities for service increased many fold, and in the day of accounting will be worthy to enter into the joy of his Lord.