

## Matthew 25:14-30      The Talents

Bear with me while I make use of an illustration from the world of sports. In the little town of Staunton, when my sons were in grade school, the football team went through a stretch of five seasons or so when they were not very good. They won only 4 games in five years. It was disheartening.

Directly around the football field, inside the track in the shape of a rectangle, stood a chain link fence, up close to the field. Many people chose to stand along that fence rather than sit in the bleachers to watch the game.

I noticed a group of boys were in the habit of standing along the fence behind the goalposts on one end week after week. I did not know who they were.

One night I wandered over towards them for some reason. The closer I got the bigger they got. I heard them making fun of the team out there getting embarrassed on the field. I struck up a conversation with them.

It turns out that they were part of the student body, having a laugh at the expense of their classmates. I said, "why aren't you out there with them? They need some help." With the exception of one who said that he would be if he hadn't been injured, they all just looked

at me as if I was silly, just another adult that they were pretty good at tuning out.

Now I know that there are good reasons not to play football, but to mock your childhood friends as they are embarrassed on the field is not one of them.

## Parables Again

Once again we find ourselves confronted with a parable. Last week it was the arrival of the bridegroom to his wedding, this week the illustration comes from the world of finance. It is the parable of the Talents.

Now, a talent is a large sum of money. Actually it is a weight, about 75 pounds. At the price of silver it would be about \$20,000, much more at the price of gold. If you remember the Parable of the unjust steward, the amount in that parable was 10,000 talents, which is great wealth. In this case we should envision quite a bit, but these amounts are more realistic.

In the story, there is a man who went away on a journey and gathered his servants together and entrusted them with his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one.

The servant with five talents and the one with two went out and invested and doubled their money. When the man came home he rewarded them by making them partners and giving them more.

It is the story of the one-talent man that is both interesting and challenging for us. The one-talent man knew how much trouble there would be if he lost the money so he buried it in the ground to make sure he would still have it when the master came, at which time he planned to return it.

When the man came the one-talent man was harshly criticized for not at least having put the money in the bank to earn a little interest and then was cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

### The World of Money

For a couple of reasons, this parable is surprising, as the parables of Jesus often are. In the first case the parable is surprising because everyone knows that sometimes those who play the high risks in the financial markets lose everything. Not only do they fail to double their money, but they end up with nothing, they may end by owing. It happens all the time.

But in this parable, the ones who risk the most are rewarded the most as if the gamblers always win. The ones who play-it-safe are punished. In the parable, to play is to win and to play it safe, to stand on the other side of the chain link fence as a spectator, is to lose.

Secondly, from the perspective of humanitarian concerns, and given the biblical concern for justice to

the poor, one would expect to hear from Jesus a Robin-Hood kind of message, like;

“from the one who has much, some will be taken and given to the one who has nothing.” “The last shall be first and the first last.”

There is a strong biblical emphasis on generosity as the result of gratitude. But here in this parable there is a different and surprising message,

“to the one who has, more will be given, and to the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

### The World of Life

But this financial illustration is not really about investment strategy, it is not about the world of money, but the world of life, the realm of spiritual things. And in this regard the surprising principle applies better and makes good sense. This is a parable of the kingdom of heaven and what it is essentially about is faith, and love, and life.

These are stories about faith: to each a measure of faith has been given, and nothing good comes from burying it or from returning it unused.

These are stories about love: to each it has been given the opportunities to have a relationships with God. It has long been my conviction based on the bible’s

message that the arena of life where understanding about God is most revealed is the arena of relationships. That is why love is the highest command. The great commandment is to love God with our whole selves.

And to each has been given a set of acquaintances; friends and family, neighbors. The first commandment is followed with a second, "Love your neighbor as yourself." To withhold love is to bury it, to stand outside, and to lose it.

These are stories about life: we are stewards of this precious life we have been given. To return it like an unwanted Christmas gift is to lose, always to lose.

I can make a pretty strong guess that most of those guys behind the end zone fence laughing at their friends will one day come to regret it. Actually, I have never met anyone who had the chance to play and passed it up ever say they didn't regret it.

Football is not that important, but life is, and we are all alive, make no mistake. Whatever you have been given is enough to find meaning and love, enough to find adventure and beauty and peace and joy, enough to share.

It is not lost on me that this is the Sunday before Thanksgiving. To follow the example of the one-talent person is to act out ingratitude in a big way. The

example of the five-talent person is better (and the two), it is the example of thankfulness. May the Lord make us truly thankful.

Amen.

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