

## GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

10.5.15

### **Doing our part - Joss Bray**

So we're looking at the parables that Jesus told about the kingdom of God. They seem to get more challenging, the more he told. Today we will think about the parable of the talents - as told in Matthew 25.

This links in to last week when our friends from Emmanuel Church Durham came. We heard about Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament and how Elijah's mantle - literally his cloak - was passed onto Elisha. Elisha realised that God had a plan for him, and he had to stand firm in that faith when Elijah was leaving. Even through troubles, his faith was being built.

We heard that it was important to listen to the right voices and lift up our eyes and ears to God rather than other influences. These other, and sometimes well meaning voices may speak facts - but do not leave room for any faith in believing what God can do. So - for example - we may be small as a church, that is a fact, but God's plan is that he will build His church and draw people to him - and influence the whole county and beyond.

After all - he has done it before! Look at the first disciples - a diverse and flawed bunch of people who kept making mistakes, but who followed Jesus anyway. Does that sound familiar? And look how God impacted the world through these people and how he is still doing it.

So last week John described people in 3 particular situations whom they wanted to pray for - those who don't know God's plan for them, those who already know it but it's hard, and those who were just starting out in God's plan.

If people want to share things from that - please do - it will encourage all of us. Remember that God is building His church - and that means we individually need to be built up as part of the body of Christ - the church. So if one person is encouraged and built up - then we will all be.

That brings me on to the parable for today. Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of God - again:

MT 25:14 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. " 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

So that's quite a difficult ending isn't it? Not quite the soft and fluffy kingdom that it is tempting to believe in. It's the hard and clear message about a master who demonstrates trust and generosity, but who expects his servants to actually do something with what they have been given.

### **This is a message for us**

So what do we see here? A master who knows his servants. He knew what they were capable of - he gave each one according to their ability. For us - our king gives each of us what he chooses. And he chooses wisely. He knows what we can handle. He knows our strengths and he knows our weaknesses. But he trusts us. And note that it is up to him what he entrusts to who.

So putting it in context - what is a talent in the New Testament?

*“Some calculate the talent in the parables to be equivalent to 20 years of wages for the common worker. Other scholars estimate more conservatively, valuing the New Testament talent somewhere between \$1,000 to \$30,000 dollars today”*

So Jesus - as usual - went to the extreme in illustrating what he wanted to get across. The master in the parable didn't give his servants a few quid - he gave them real wealth to manage. We have to conclude that what God gives us to do is really important. He entrusts us with responsibilities that will build his Kingdom on earth. These things are not optional extras or someone else's job - they are for all of us.

It is not for us to think - I wish God had this or that for me - like him or her over there. Our heavenly father knows what we are capable of - and gives accordingly. Both of the servants who used what was entrusted to them wisely, were commended in the same way:

*“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!”*

That commendation was irrespective of what their ability was and the amount involved. That will be the same for us. However, there is a hard lesson and a warning here as well. What about the servant with one talent? Clearly the master knew that he didn't have the ability to handle a lot - and that was ok. The servant was not rebuked in any way for that. The master made allowances and gave him a smaller but still important task.

The mistake the servant made was that he didn't really know the master at all. He thought he did. He had this idea that the master was unjust and unfair and to be feared. The master responds to these accusations not by denying or arguing about them - but by pointing out that if the servant really believed this, then why didn't he at least do something which had very low risk attached to it. The servant was cast out to a place of eternal regret and grief. He never really knew his master and actually accused him of things which were distortions of the truth. In contrast, the servants who knew their master received great rewards.

## **We need to know our master**

This is vital. If we have the wrong idea about our Heavenly Father, then we will not be doing the things he wants us to do. We need to understand that He gave us the most precious thing he could - his Son - so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. That is absolute love and commitment. That is who our God is - full of love and mercy and grace to us. But at the same time he is a just and holy God who cannot tolerate sin - that is why Jesus had to pay the price for our sin and disobedience. In Jesus, we see God's character reflected perfectly. If we want to know our master better - we must look at Jesus.

The one talent servant had a very one sided view of his master. Sometimes we see the same thing around us. To some, God is harsh and judgemental and someone to be afraid of. Whereas others make the opposite mistake of not taking his holiness and justice seriously and not fearing God in the right way.

We need to make sure we know him more and more - that is why we study the bible, why we teach and encourage each other, why God sent Jesus and then his Holy Spirit to live in us.

## **What if we feel that we haven't got much to offer?**

Maybe God calls us to do smaller things for Him, maybe bigger things. Size doesn't matter. We don't see the two talent servant complaining about the five talent servant. Who are we to look at others and question God's decision in giving them things to do which seem more worthwhile or glamorous than what he has given us? That is worldly thinking - not kingdom of God thinking.

Here is the question to ask - what is my part to play in the body - the representation of the Kingdom of God that is the church?

If you don't know - ask God and ask others in the church. It's amazing what people see in us that we don't see - and it's not all negative! And don't "hide your light under a bushel" as it were. The gifts, talents and responsibilities that God gives us to bring the Kingdom are there to be used - and celebrated.