

Tidenham 19th November 2023 Zeph 1:7&12ff; Matt 25:14-30

The parable of the Talents

Prayer

Intro – It is easy to think this parable is just about using gifts...and if anyone can do this well it is Phillip (downs syndrome) and using the talents given by God faithfully and trustfully and ‘entering into the joy of his master’ and that is the little sentence that I’d like us to focus on.

This isn’t simply a message about investment of capital – the talent was a unit of exchange by weight of silver or gold (let’s not lose sight of metaphor) yes but the point is the colossal value of these talents. 1 talent was the equivalent of about 6,000 denarii and each one of those represented the income of a day’s labour... you can do the maths!)

Neither is it simply about using the gifts we have to the very best of our ability. Not just an encouragement to ‘do your very best’. It is deeper than that.

Let’s hold in mind firstly the word *complacency* that the prophet Zephaniah recognises in the people he is warning of trouble to come. Not dissimilar to the trouble Jesus warns of in the parable. Complacency – I’m alright Jack. So self-serving, self-protection, making assumptions, lazily, without checking the truth, lack of trust and obedience, demonising others, them over there that are a waste of space – that sort of thing. And a lack of concern over anything but the here and now. So there is one challenge but we don’t have time to unpack that in a short homily!

There is also our struggle when we think: ‘each according to his ability’ and then read of brutal response to the slave that was only given one talent. It seems a bit unjust. Another challenge. So, I may not answer this in detail but perhaps bring a little for us to reflect on.

We understand that the master is in fact Jesus – he is Lord and he will be coming back albeit after a ‘journey’ (a good long time in those days). But we know and trust that Jesus will return as well. His sharing of his own gifts gives us humans the opportunity to: ‘enter into the joy of your master’. A slave owns nothing – so there is massive trust involved here, giving the slave stewardship of property. If we remember ourselves as slaves to Christ or as made in the image of Christ – his creation – we also own nothing. All things belong to God (of your own do we give you), we too are simply stewards of resources in all

our Lords creation. (c/f I worked hard for this its mine – who gave you the abilities in the first place?)

We are called to trust in Him. And like him, to be trustworthy, to use and to be good stewards of all that he has given. To do so in obedience and therefore to be able, to *share in the joy of the master*. Emulating Jesus: as we have in Hebrew 12:2 'who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross, the shame.... 'etc. It can be ours to enjoy now and will be so much more, the now and not yet of the Kingdom of God. This is the comfort. It is more blessed to give than receive, is a taster.

Now if we look again at the one talent chap who seems to have been given a raw deal? The master, he believes to be a scoundrel – he has no trust, does not see the master's generosity and does not act appropriately as the master goes off on a journey. Seriously? Would the master invest so much in a person if he were a rogue?

Is Jesus really a fraud, a hard task master? Would *he* have invested so much, his very life if he were? Oh, I hear so many who would seek to downplay the Lordship and deity of Christ... 'Yeah, he may have been a good teacher but but but... 'really, is a great teacher even, going to invest that much?

Matthew has him using very strong language as a warning to the apparently errant slave. The slave did keep the talent safe – but he did not use it, he did not trust the master. – he really did hide his talent under a bushel! All of us, like Philip are called to use the talents we are given, *trusting the giver*, however much or little we have, however capable or not we are.

You know I get a bit mad with self-righteous politicians et al who bang on about hard-working families in this levelling up business... and how they should be applauded. Thereby damming those who apparently are not working hard and are struggling desperately to keep their heads above water. Well, many of those have had few gifts – little in the way of financially rewardable talent, no decent education, a poor upbringing into social deprivation.... And frankly, no support. So, I hardly think Jesus would expect them to be able to manage the huge rents and utility bills that are demanded of them. Yet, again, like Philip many of them use their seemingly humbler gifts to bless us with care for our elderly and infants, with loving support when we are ill, with picking up our rubbish, packing and sending our purchases from online vendors.... Often for very long hours.... And hard working 'families' – immediately ignoring a

significant percentage of our population who are not blessed with 'family. And others who are disabled, unwell or whatever. Gosh how we need to remember that we are to love our neighbours, particularly those blessed with little, the poor, to see that they flourish! Rant over!!

No, Jesus is addressing his disciples, who have much– he is talking to those who know, who have met him and walked with him. To those who already know that he is not a rogue – who are to pass on the good news that he is not a rogue. People like us.

Even in my darkest nights of the soul, (retirement, having to move, being ill, losing my mother etc – horrible three years) when I struggle to believe. I find I cannot deny with the evidence and knowledge set before me that Jesus WAS and IS and therefore, I *trust* that he will come back and ever *will be*, and do what he asks by faith. And it is in so doing, even when it seems burdensome or odd, if our gifts may be few, we are asked to keep on caring and keep on telling, keep on using those talents – however grand or humble, however many or few – in trust, in obedience, that we *will* therefore, **enter into his joy** in the here and now – and SO much more in the return of Jesus the master in the future.

Amen