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The Parable Of The Talents

by T. Austin-Sparks

Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.

Reading: Matt. 25:14-46.

There are a few things which lie very much on the face of this part of our Lord's teaching which we will try to set out simply and plainly.

What the Talents Are

The first question arises as to the talents, what the talents are, but I think we need not discuss exactly the nature of these talents. The important thing is that we recognise their significance, that is, what they signify. They are evidently values given by the Lord in order that they shall be turned to increase for Him and that may cover a very wide range. We can say that anything that the Lord has given to us by way of a possibility to make increase for Him comes within the designation of a talent, so that our attitude towards life has to be that of watchfulness as to how, where, and what may be made to increase for the Lord's pleasure. It is an attitude, a mentality, a state of heart. These talents have been reduced to a very small catalogue of specific qualifications or gifts. It seems to me that the Lord is, rather, covering the whole ground of what can be made to serve Him in enlargement by our diligence.

God's Sovereignty in the Gift of Talents

Then the second thing (and I am not staying to work these matters out, I just want to get these very practical and important lessons of the Lord over to our hearts) is that what talents we have, are not our responsibility. That is a matter of God's sovereignty. He gave, and He gave to this one so much and to that one so much and to the other so much. The recipients were not responsible for what they received and what they possessed. That wholly lay with the judgment of the Giver, and to recognise that would be to deliver us from getting into false positions, trying to go beyond our measure, to do somebody else's job, and rise to somebody else's position or stature. No, He gave out of His own judgment, and the talents which we possess are not our responsibility at all. They are the outworking of His sovereign wisdom and judgment and grace.

It is a tremendous thing in life if only we can get our measure, and recognise our measure. It will bring our own hearts rest, it will keep us in a position of safety and it will result in a meekness about us, "That is my measure, that is my capacity, that is what the Lord has given to me. Within that compass I move, not striving to be someone else, to do someone else's work, but recognising just what the Lord has given to me, and what that represents." That is, if you think about it, far more helpful in life than it may appear. Let us remember, then, that the sovereignty of God takes responsibility for our calling, our work. That is God's appointment and He knows what He is doing with us.

The Lord's Pleasure the Governing Consideration

The third thing is that over all that which governs is the Lord's satisfaction and pleasure. You notice that that runs right through this whole section of the Word - the Lord's satisfaction and pleasure. The thing which the Lord had to say to the praise of the two, the five talent man and the two talent man, was that they worked as in the light of His countenance and their reward was "the joy of your Lord". And in the second part of the chapter, which I believe, and I think we shall see in a moment, is closely related to the first part, it is all the time: "unto Me". "You did it unto Me". "You did it not unto Me". Everything is as to the Lord, the Lord always in view, the Lord always before our face: the satisfaction and pleasure of the Lord. That is the thing which governs the life of the child of God, the servant of the Lord. Everything has got to be looked at in that way. It is not just a matter of duty, obligation, commandment, it is the Lord's pleasure, the Lord's satisfaction, and here again it is a state of heart. The two had a right state of heart towards their Lord. The third had a wrong attitude of heart - "I know you, you are hard". The attitude, the state of heart toward their Lord, it was that that made the difference in the outcome.

So here the Lord is saying, in other words, that that which governs the life of a true servant of the Lord is that he or she takes up life to make it work out for the Lord's pleasure and for the Lord's satisfaction, not their own, and not as a matter of their being compelled to do it, but a matter of heart devotion to the Lord.

The Rule of Increase

Next the Lord sets forth the rule of increase - enlargement and increase in opportunity, facility - Divine endowment is based upon faithfulness and devotion to Him in what we have now. There is no doubt that a very great deal is lost because we fail to use the present opportunity by hankering all the time after a larger one, by always thinking of the day when we shall be able to serve the Lord more fully, when we shall get into our stride, when we shall have facility, when we shall occupy the position to serve Him. We are all the time projecting it into the future and mentally holding on to a

time and to conditions when it will be possible for us to do the grand thing for the Lord, the real thing for the Lord, and that will-o'-the-wisp of the morrow which never comes is simply eating out all the profits and values of *today*, and it is perhaps one of the most terrible things to contemplate, to reach a time when we see that we could have given the Lord so very much more if we had been bent upon it then, instead of always thinking of the time when we would be able to give Him more.

The Lord enunciates this rule of increase and says in effect, "The way of enlargement and increase in My service is the way of utter faithfulness and devotion to the measure that you have now." You may be only a one talent person; there is the prospect, the possibility, of you becoming a two talent, a five talent person, but the way is to make good, even though it be a little measure, to turn that to account and see that all the interest possible to the Lord is secured from that little. Faithfulness today may be enlarged opportunity and provision tomorrow, but we can take it that unless there is that faithfulness today, that tomorrow will never come.

Now let us be very practical about it. Are we really making good within the narrow limits of our present life? What are the opportunities now? Let us take stock of our opportunities today, of the possibility of today. What are they? Can any of us really say that there are no opportunities in our sphere of life, that there is nothing that can be turned to account for the Lord today in our present position? I do not think that anyone can say that. You may have a narrow sphere and you may have little opportunity, but you have some. Maybe you are all the time looking for a larger, fuller, greater opportunity. That will never be, unless today with the little, you are making good.

So the Lord says here that the way of increase, enlargement and fuller gift, fuller trust, is the way of faithfulness and devotion to *today's* opportunity, *today's* possibility, *today's* measure. The word to the two was "good and faithful". *Good* - you have made good by being faithful to your measure of opportunity! Set over against that what He said to the other man - "You wicked and slothful servant". There you have the heart of the matter. What is wickedness? It is failing to make good in the opportunity the possibility that the Lord has given you, and that comes of an inward slothfulness. Remember Paul's words: "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom. 12:11), or, as Moffatt translates it, "Maintain the spiritual glow." That is the key, the spiritual glow. What is spiritual glow? Why, it is this, the opposite of slothfulness, making good every opportunity for the Lord. That is the way of enlargement.

Our Reward the Joy of the Lord

Then you look again and you see that our blessing and our reward is the joy of the Lord. That is the result of the Lord getting His portion, and if we did but understand it, there is no reward greater, no blessing fuller, than the echo in our own hearts of the Lord's own satisfaction with us. We all like people to be pleased with us and very often a little commendation makes us as "pleased as Punch" with ourselves. We are very happy if people can see some good and note it and remark upon it. Well, I suppose that is human nature and not many lives can get on without just a word of commendation now and again. I think the Lord has indicated that He wants us to encourage one another in that way, commending one another, but if in the realm of merely human life that is true, how much greater is it true to have in our own hearts by the Holy Spirit the witness that the Lord is well pleased. That could make heaven for us, and I believe that that is just the key to this chapter.

You notice that the whole matter here resolves itself into heaven and hell. There are awful things here in this connection about hell. "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is

prepared for the devil and his angels". There is hell; heaven on the other hand... while I do not dismiss anything more definite than that as to heaven and hell, I do think that the very nature of heaven or hell is this: the pleasure or displeasure of the Lord registered positively in the soul. That can make our heaven or our hell and to know that the Lord says, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful" - for the Lord to say that can make heaven for our hearts, but that is His own satisfaction, His own pleasure, His own delight, finding an echo in our hearts. Our reward, our blessing, is that; there is nothing more gratifying than that.

"Unto Me"

Then the last thing. What does it mean that the Lord gets His portion, finds His pleasure and satisfaction - for everything is bound up with and depends upon that. What does it mean? If our attitude towards life is to be that the Lord is satisfied and gets His portion, if that is to be the consideration which governs everything, if the talents just take their significance from the possibilities which they hold for bringing the Lord satisfaction, if the rule of increase is our attitude toward the Lord's pleasure in using today's opportunity and today's measure of possibility, then what does that mean that the Lord gets His portion, His satisfaction, His pleasure?

This is supremely practical and it is here that I think the second part of the chapter bears upon the first. "Inasmuch as you did it (or did it not) unto one of these least, you did it (you did it not) unto Me". I say that is practical; that keeps us out of the clouds. That will save us from a false spiritual position, that false position which is always trying somehow to please the Lord, serve the Lord, do things for the Lord and overlooks a hundred and one practical everyday matters of the interests of the Lord in those about us. It brings things very near. It says that that one in need, whatever the need may be, is Jesus Christ in practical effect for us. It is a terrific thing to contemplate, but to look at this one, this bound one, this afflicted one, this needy one, and to not shut our eyes and to say, "There is the Lord Jesus in need!" - that is practical, is it not? It is not just imagination, that is what He says here. He is saying in effect, "You cannot take an attitude towards one of these least without taking that attitude towards Me; whatever the attitude is, that is your attitude towards Me because they represent an opportunity, their need calls out what you have of Myself to meet that need and by giving, there is an increase of Myself there, and that is what My heart is set upon - gaining ground, gaining territory, gaining room!"

Oh, I do feel, beloved, that one of our needs is to be saved from false spiritual positions. There are many of them and amongst them there is this one of some kind of spiritual life, some kind of spiritual work, some kind of spiritual position, some kind of spiritual mentality, which is abstract and which just misses a thousand and one practical situations around us.

So it just comes back to what we were saying at the beginning. The Lord getting His portion is: what is my opportunity just at the moment, what is there around me of need? Of course I have not come down on to the merely social plane, that is not what I am thinking about. I am thinking of Christ gaining ground, serving the Lord, bringing the Lord's interests in. What is my opportunity now for this? What is around me now in this matter? How can I meet the situation with Christ? That is the true Christian life and service. I say it is very practical, but it is very searching, very challenging. It will find us out and it will save us from a false position. Here is a need, a need of Christ - that is the point. If only the Lord could get in there, if only the Lord could be brought in there, there would be something very much for His pleasure, His satisfaction, His glory, and that attitude towards our

contacts, our associations, our opportunities every day is what the Lord means by doing it unto Him or not doing it unto Him.

The Lord is personified in every opportunity which is given to us for bringing Him in. Do you understand that? There He is indeed. You just follow these things quietly and think about them, for here is the Lord's word to govern our lives. The opportunity may be small - that is His affair. Whether it is enlarged is mine, whether there is increase depends upon my devotion and faithfulness, but the thing that has to be always in my thought, in my eye, is not the enlargement of my opportunity and influence, but *the Lord's pleasure, the Lord's satisfaction* - a state of heart devotion to the Lord.