

Get Busy!

There have been occasions when a small number of Christians have resigned their jobs, sold their possessions, isolated themselves from family and friends, moved to a remote location, and dressed themselves in white to await the Lord's return. This deception has always ended in disappointment and sometimes with tragic consequences. We have been told to watch and wait, but also to work. Get busy!

Immediately following the Parable of the Ten Virgins is the Parable of the Talents. The virgins were expected to wait; the servants were expected to work. In regard to his return, both responses are necessary. If all we do is wait, it will lead to idleness; if all we do is work, it will lead to drudgery. But we are to do both; we are joyfully waiting for the King and busily working in his kingdom.

Read Matthew 25:14–30.

A parable is not an allegory where every detail has a hidden meaning; the Parable of the Talents is a simple story that describes the expectations of a property owner and the responsibility of his servants. The man who went on a journey, “entrusted **his** property” to his servants; it was **his** property and they were **his** servants. We must always remember we are members of **his** Church, we serve in **his** kingdom and we are labourers in **his** vineyard. Keep busy, we are serving the King!

The Master

The master entrusted his servants with **his** property; all that we have is his. The master then departed leaving the servants to their own devices; the Lord trusts us, the ball is in our court. The master has expectations, at the very least he expects interest on his investment (25:27); the talents he has entrusted to us have the potential to multiply. But there was a delay.

Just as “the bridegroom was a long time in coming” (25:5), the master stayed away “a long time” (25:19). Even though Jesus does not know the day or hour of his return, he is aware of a lengthy delay. In that delay we are expected to faithfully wait and diligently work; we can be confident, the bridegroom will come and the master will return. When the Master returns, he will inspect what we have done, “he settled accounts with them” (25:19). He will then give rewards that will be far greater than what has been entrusted. The Lord will return, let's get busy!

The Talents

In the parable, the property that was entrusted was in the form of talents, a talent was a unit of weight. A silver talent was valued at around 6,000 day's pay, maybe \$1,800,000 in today's values. A gold talent was probably worth 30 times as much. Whether silver or gold, they are significant amounts that demanded a thoughtful and diligent response.

Each of the servants were prompt in their actions; two of them put the money to work; the third "went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money" (25:18).

This is the twist in the tale; just as it was inexplicable for five of the virgins not to take oil for their lamps, so it was inexplicable for one of the servants to bury the talent he was given. Imagine being given \$1,800,000 in cash (the value of a silver talent) and burying it in the ground! It's inconceivable, inexplicable and quite bizarre.

On the day of reckoning the man gave the reasons for his behaviour. "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 hid your talent in the ground" (25:24–25). The man had ***no love*** for his master; he had ***no trust*** in the master's character and ***no understanding*** of his master's plans. There was ***no faith*** in his heart, only fear; and his actions produced ***no fruit***.

Having pronounced the first two servants as "good and faithful" (25:21), the master described the third servant as "you wicked, lazy servant" (25:26). These pairs of words are exact opposites; good and faithful, wicked and lazy. Good, meaning sound, upright and useful; wicked meaning corrupt, evil and painful. Faithful meaning trustworthy and reliable; lazy meaning negligent, reluctant and good for nothing.

Doing nothing

In the *Parable of the Good Samaritan*, the Priest and Levite did nothing wrong, they just did nothing to help the wounded traveller. In the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, at 9 am the landowner found people in the market-place "doing nothing" (Matt. 20:3); and at 5 pm, with just an hour of daylight remaining, he finds others and says to them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing? (20:6).

In the *Parable of the Talents*, the third servant was not a terrible sinner; he did not use the talent for selfish or evil purposes. He buried the talent, then sat on his hands and did nothing. The context is the return of the

Lord and the message is clear; it's harvest time, don't stand around doing nothing while the harvest is going to waste. The game has but a few minutes left to play; don't be a spectator, get in the game. Don't bury what God has given you, get involved, get busy!

Don't bury your talent

The third servant failed to use what the master had given him; he placed little value on the talent even though it was a large amount. There is no excuse for his action; he buried the talent long before the master made his delayed return. We do not know if the man resented the other servants who had been given more, but he certainly resented his master, "I know you are a hard man" (25:24). But it is bizarre to bury cash. Rather than working, he is criticising. It has been said that those who have the least are the loudest critics; they do the least and adventure the least.

The man buried the talent; buried means to wrap in burial cloths. The man treated the money as if it were a dead thing; to him, it was better buried. The other servants discovered the opposite, their talents were alive; the money was put to work and multiplied one hundred per cent. When we use what God has placed within our lives, it grows. Therefore, get busy!

Where is the Holy Spirit?

The master gave the talents to the servants without offering any detailed instructions. He gave a different amount to each servant "according to their ability" (25:15). It is interesting that the word ability is *dunamis*, the same word that describes the power of the Holy Spirit. *Dunamis* means power, might, force, motivation; it is power that generates power. As the servants put their money to work, rather than the work exhausting them it energised them. Get busy; it will empower you to do more.

But where is the Holy Spirit in this parable? The servants are left to their own devices, their own ideas and their own skills. But Jesus is speaking pre-Pentecost; he does not mention the Holy Spirit because he had not yet been given (John 7:39). When the Spirit would be poured out, he would energise the believers (Acts 1:8). The kingdom of God does not advance by human effort, "it is not by *human* might or power but by my Spirit, says the Lord" (Zech. 4:6).

Our master has left on a journey; he has commissioned us "go, make disciples, baptise and teach all nations" (Matt. 28:19–20). We do this by using our natural gifts and strengths, in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a blend of the natural and the supernatural; God uses natural people

who are supernaturally empowered by the Spirit. Serving God in our own strength will exhaust us; doing what he has called us to do by the Spirit's power will energise us. Allow God to fill you with his Spirit and get busy.

Another twist in the tale

“Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten talents” (25:28). It would seem more equitable to give the bonus talent to the servant who had four, but Jesus explains in a powerful statement, “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” (25:29). This verse also appears in Matthew 13:12 and Luke 19:26.

The God of abundance wants you and I to live in his abundance. This does not mean accumulating wealth but, by diligence and faithfulness multiplying what God has given us more and more. God gives more to those who will use it more; the master knew it would be a good investment to give the bonus talent to the servant who had the greater potential to produce even more.

The Last Word

“Throw that worthless servant outside” (25:30); the words sound as harsh as “and the door was shut” (25:10) to the foolish virgins. Both phrases have a sense of terrible finality; once the day of opportunity has passed, it has passed forever. For the virgins it was an opportunity for salvation; for the servants it was an opportunity for service. Get busy.

How do we keep busy? What are some ways we make the best use of what the Master has entrusted to us? We will conclude this study by suggesting some practical ways of being busy and effective.

Next week, session 3, “Signs of the Times”

Suggested answers about how to keep busy and make the best use of the gifts God has given us.

1. We all have an equal amount of time. How can we “make the most of every opportunity in these evil days” (Eph. 5:16). Lost time can never be found. Therefore, we should keep daily, weekly and monthly planners. We need to identify the time wasters and remove them from our life. Can we tithe our time to God? Remember, time spent with your wife and family is never wasted.
2. We all have natural abilities and talents. Have we identified our giftings? Are we using our giftings? Trying to be something we are not is frustrating to both us and those around us. But identify, develop and use your talent, and it will bring satisfaction and increase.
3. The local church is central to God’s redemptive plan. In every local church there is a core group of people who lead or pray or serve or connect. How can I become more involved in that core group and recruit others to the core?
4. Are we involved in discipling others? People are central to God’s plan. If you are a musician, teach someone what you know. If you are preacher/teacher, share what you know with others and teach them how to share. If you are a deacon/server, train someone else to do what you do. You only have to be one step ahead of someone to help them.
5. What does all this have to do with the End Times? It’s about being busy so when the Master returns we will hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”