

I See “Napkin People”

Two Potent Parables, given by Christ, illustrate an all too Common Approach people take. What is Most Unfortunate is when Religious Institutions work to Encourage and even Enforce ‘laying-up’ ones’ God Given Talents!

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In a memorable 1999 film, “*The Sixth Sense*”, a young boy, played by child actor Haley Osment, portrayed one having the ability to see ghosts. He confided in his co-star, “*I see dead people!*” From what became a famous line, I pose one similar, which may illustrate an all too prevalent condition within God’s Church in the modern era.

God made it very clear that He gives spiritual gifts (Talents / Pounds) to those who show the potential of making profitable use of them. So important was this factor, that he gave two insightful parables that have obvious application to His Church. But does the point of these parables interest the average Churchgoer? And, what does it have to do with how we live and how we apply ourselves to the commission Christ set before His True Disciples?

Designated Commissioners?

Is the Great Commission something intended to be exclusively placed in the hands of a few leaders, or is there a greater effort which we all should be attentive to? Did God intend that the conduct of His Commission be tightly regulated by individuals He may not have chosen for prominence and may or may not be able to really use? After all, whole organizations have been known to have become apostate, not the least of which and not the last of which is the Church of the early second century. In large part, that was the result of an increasingly powerful organization. The answer to this question is what can determine what kind of laborers we choose to be, if we’re content to exist as just passive supporters or as motivated participants?

Another factor is also involved. Believers come at this question under two different approaches. First, our **personal** response to our high calling, which may express the tendency to comfortably sit on the

sidelines, letting others carry all the weight, and secondly, being set aside into a sedentary status by others, situations where believers are actively discouraged from, and even prevented, from becoming active participants in directly proclaiming God’s Truth. Where this can impose a ‘problem’, seen from either side, is when God entrusts certain Talents to individuals. HE places individuals in His Church as He sees fit. HE provides talents, abilities and opportunities as He sees fit. Power structures that can become established in church organizations may not be fully amenable to who is so entrusted and when. The point is, what happens when God sees fit but when a leadership doesn’t?

This is an area that calls for careful consideration.

When hierarchies become established and take on a life of their own, disconnecting from direction of God’s Spirit, promoting their own favored players (those who put their hierarchy first), a situation can develop that is detrimental to the conduct of The Commission. Not only from day to day, but in the long run as well. Talents not used are not developed! In the long term, the overall qualities of the membership are underdeveloped, not having their senses exercised as they should’ve been! This is not something that Christ deferred pointing out to us. He addresses His displeasure with that situation and what the end result will be!

Motivation as much as Authorization

It isn’t the purpose of this paper to criticize those organizations which fail to use and to develop the talents within the body, except to the degree they actively promote ‘napkin people’ type responses. What IS a napkin person? Consider this picture:

From Luke 19:12 “*He said therefore, A certain*

nobleman went into a far country **to receive for himself a kingdom**, and to return.

13: And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, **Occupy till I come**. (Occupy means work with and make use of.)

14: But **his citizens** hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. (These citizens are not the servants.)

15: And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these **servants** to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.

16: Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.

17: And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.

18: And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds.

19: And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.

20: And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which **I have kept laid up in a napkin**:

21: For **I feared thee**, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.

22: And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou **wicked servant**. Thou knewest that **I was an austere man**, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow:

23: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?

24: And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds.

26: For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.

He Feared the Lord!

A number of interesting details emerge when we consider this parable. First, that each of this man's servants was given a pound with which to work. The sum was given with the clear intent that an increase was to be obtained by using it. We see that in both verses 13 and 23. Interesting also is the response of the citizenry in verse 14, that their

'increase occupation' would be carried out in an environment of resentment among the society around them. Does any of this bear resemblance to the work of the Church in the world?

We also see differing degrees of gain from each servant. We see a tenfold increase in one case and a fivefold increase in another, each with the same degree of opportunity. The difference wasn't so much due to the amount given, as it was how the individual servant applied himself to the use of it!

But the main point of this parable lies with the under-performing servant. Recognizing the seriousness of his charge, and being intimidated by the responsibility he was given, one servant took what he regarded as the 'safe' approach and did nothing. Carefully protecting his given means, he protected it for the master's eventual re-assumption. The problem is, that wasn't the charge he was given. He was instructed to make good use of it toward something profitable. At least, let the money earn some interest on its own!

How many do we encounter who **accept** the pound, but don't think they have any obligation to make use of it in service to the One who gave it freely? Part of the problem is when people accept the premise that "Christ did it all for you"! Some things yes, but not all things, as we can see from these narratives.

Loss Even of Servanthood!

We should all take special note of this master's personal characteristic as it regards this area of responsibility. He is accused of being, and He admits to being austere, depending on others for profitable increase. Not all things that a person has is just given him. It is expected that what IS given is to be increased using the recipients' personal ability. To return the gift we are given without any attempt to enhance its value is an effective insult to the giver, thus explaining the reaction in verse 26.

Now, a second similar parable re-enforces the lesson. In this one, the gift varies depending on the recipients' individual capabilities, but the rate of increase is the same. It is found in Matthew 25:14.

“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

15: And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. (Different people have differing abilities.)

16: Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.

17: And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

*18: But **he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.***

19: After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

20: And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

21: His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

22: He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

23: His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

24: Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:

*25: And I was afraid, and went and **hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.***

26: His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:

27: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.

28: Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

29: For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

Like in the parable of the pounds, there's a requirement that the servant employ his own effort in gaining a positive increase with what he is given. In part, the talent comes from the master, yet the part that is increase is derived from the abilities of the recipient. And, notice, the talents are provided to the servants in accordance with their varying personal abilities. God doesn't provide talents and opportunities nor expect an increase where the individual's ability to produce one just isn't there.

Faith Enhanced in Expression

This brings us to another important consideration: When God awards a 'talent', it's because He knows that person CAN produce. Any Servant known by God to be too reluctant to use his faith to actually accomplish anything will not be entrusted with responsibility. This is unfortunate.

Consider another factor. When a person is in an environment where he is prohibited from using his talent, should he be given one, and God knows he wouldn't, even if he has ability and inclination, it'd put that person's servanthood at risk if he were to be given the talent he otherwise could be given. The point here is that God may hold back awarding talents in certain situations, realizing that the recipient can not or will not effectively use it. There are religious environments detrimental to spiritual development. We see them all the time. It is those environments which can result in God not being able to award talents to certain individuals, thus dampening the growth dynamic within the body of Christ. (the Church).

Does this environment account for the assessment of a church having but 'little strength' in Revelation 3:8? Does this in any way account for the shortage of effective servants in the congregations?

Some may say, "I have no usable talent." But when reviewing the list of some 27 attributes given us by grace in Romans 12, few are left without excuse!

But we should always remain attentive to the fact that use of one's talents is not to be taken lightly. Failure to do so can result in the loss of even what we have, even to the point of it being spiritual lethal as both parables amply indicate. Don't depreciate your God-given Talents by dis-use! 📖