

## The Parable of the Talents

Jesus taught His disciples about the Kingdom of Heaven by telling them a parable about talents. (Matthew 25:14-30). A 'talent' is a unit of money, said to be worth about 20 years' wages of a labourer. This was one of His final teachings before departing, and delegating to them the responsibility, as stewards, to care for His kingdom.

The main point of the parable of the talents is that we should be diligent to use the gifts and talents that God has given us for His glory. The first two servants enthusiastically invested the talents entrusted to them and earned a good reward, and were called 'good and faithful servants'. The third, motivated by fear and mistrust of the character of his master, buried his talent, failing to earn any increase at all, and was labelled a 'useless servant'. The good and faithful servants were rewarded because of their stewardship of their master's resources entrusted to them, while the servant who feared and mistrusted his master, and did not utilise the resources entrusted to him, was judged and rejected.

What if, especially as leaders of a church or any other Christian organisation, God has given you numerous 'talents' – in the form of persons in your church or organisation, each with their own special gifts or talents that could, and should, all be used in that body, for the benefit of all, and for His glory? (Ephesians 4:7-8). And what if, instead of investing the 'talents' - that is in the people given to you - by assisting each person to recognise, develop and to practically use his or her unique gifts and calling in your church or organisation, you instead 'buried' them? – you failed to develop them and their special talents and ignored their potential to contribute to the body, and instead assumed it was your responsibility as the leader to do everything yourself, and perhaps even assumed, for any areas that were not your personal expertise, that they were probably not essential or even important for that body anyway!

What does the bible say? The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), as the final instruction given by Jesus to his disciples, was to '*go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.*' This is a far greater and more all-encompassing responsibility than to say merely 'lead as many to salvation as possible and then look after them'. To make disciples, Jesus, as the head of the church, has given the church leaders with five distinct functions - the five-fold ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Note that this is not one person with five gifts, but five types of leaders, each with their own special primary gift in which they function.

It is not the function of one person to perform every task in any particular church or ministry. Rather it is the leader's responsibility to, '*... be sure that everything is done properly and in order*' (1 Corinthians 14:40). It is the responsibility of the leaders (each in his or her own field) to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12). This is what Paul taught in his letters to the Ephesians and the Corinthians, and again affirmed in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to Timothy, near the end of his ministry, that he had also personally done so, and encouraged Timothy to do the same – '*to teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others*' (2 Timothy 2:2).

How did this work in the early church? In Acts 13:1 we read that in the church at Antioch in Syria there were prophets (plural) and teachers (plural) and listed the names of several of them. Can we in our churches today say the same, and list their names? So it seems to me that a good place to start would be to establish 'schools' to train up the prophets, and 'schools' to train up and equip each of the assistant and future evangelists, pastors and teachers. And why not also the worship leaders training and equipping their teams, and likewise the councillors, the intercessors, the leadership of the youth and any and all other ministries doing the same?

How can we do this? With on the job training. One does not teach, train and equip a person to for instance drive a car by saying, "watch me drive for the next 20 years and I am sure you will get the hang of it, and then you can take over when I leave." No, their leaders start teaching and training and then guiding them, with increasing autonomy and responsibility, as part of the team.

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