



## SERMON

# Giving in His Name - Part 2

Colossians 3:15-17 and Matthew 25:14-30

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The point is almost impossible to miss. The master entrusts the servants with talents, a particular measure of money in the ancient world. The servant who received five talents was wise, invested the talents and doubled their value. The servant who buried the talent in the ground was risk averse, and thereby lost what had been given.

Lots of lessons here: Be good stewards of your abilities. Use them or lose them. Don't be afraid to try. Never say, "I have so little, my contribution won't matter." People may not be equal in talent but they can surely be equal in effort. You can probably think of a few others you have heard. The point is always obvious—those who follow Jesus are to seek to be like the five-talent servant and not like the one-talent servant. Case closed.

OK. But there is one aspect of this story that troubles me if we close the case so quickly. What about the servant in the middle, the two-talent guy? Is he superfluous? For that matter, were any of the characters in Jesus' stories superfluous? I don't think so. Yes, there was the wise, multi-talented servant as an example of excellent stewardship and a foolish, single-talented servant as an example of poor stewardship. But also there was this one in the middle, a person with a lot less than the "super" five-talent servant but one with a lot more than the hapless, one-talent servant. In my humble opinion, the one in the middle is there for an important purpose.

Let's check him out. What do we know about the two-talent servant? Well, obviously he is somewhere in between the two others in terms of the master's faith in his abilities. He has been entrusted with two talents—twice as much as the foolish servant. But he is only entrusted with two, which is just 40 percent as much as the wise, five-talent guy. Perhaps the master thought the one in the middle had some potential, but he was not considered likely to be a standout performer.

And what did the two-talent servant do with the two talents? He doubled them, and wound up returning four talents to the boss. His performance was, proportionately, on a par with that of the five-talent servant. He did just as well as the shining-star example in the parable.

Frankly, although the parable does not say it, I suspect that Jesus' first audience was at least somewhat surprised when the master received four talents from the servant in the middle. We can assume that the master was astute, that is why he is the master in the story. The crowd probably expected the excellent performance from the five-talent servant. They also probably expected worthless performance from the one-talent servant although the master had deliberately entrusted the man with a talent in order to give him an opportunity to prove himself. But the two-talent servant's performance was better than expected. If he had brought back, say three talents, that would have been a predictable, good showing for him. But performing at the same level as the top guy? Now that was something! When the master said "Well done, good and trustworthy servant..." to the one in the middle, I suspect his congratulation was just a little louder and just a little heartier than his comments to the other two.

Most of us are two-talent servants. We are not fools, idiots, wastrels of the riches of God. We realize

that God has entrusted us with a great deal, so we are not going to foolishly hide, and completely fail to utilize what God has given into our care. On the other hand, most of us are not superstars of the faith. Few of us are going to become Saint Pauls or John Calvins, or Mother Teresas. We are not likely to build thousands of sub-Saharan water wells or cathedrals to God's glory, nor offer our lives up in martyrdom on some foreign field for Christ. Somewhere smack in between the heights and depths is where most of us live. And the good news is, that is exactly where we can faithfully serve God. Not only can we serve, but we can serve well.

Let me repeat what I said last week: If you wonder whether you're giving enough, the safest bet is to assume you could do more, and then try to do just that. Seek the Lord's guidance, stretch yourself in terms of how much you give to the Lord's work and then sustain it. We can utilize what has been entrusted to us just as effectively as any of the greats who have gone before us.

Giving is always about discipleship. It is about expressing our heart's devotion. It is about doing everything whether in word or in deed in the name of Jesus. The only question your church is asking you to answer is "What percentage of my income is the Lord calling me to give through my church this next year?"

Does my answer truly reflect my heart's devotion and trust in Him? Does my answer stretch my discipleship? If not make an adjustment before you hand it in. What's most important is that we have each sought the Lord and have listened to Him.