

Use It or Lose It

Text: Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus told many stories to His followers. Most all of His kingdom truths were given in story form. They are called parables (heaven truths in earthly stories.) In a few days Jesus would be crucified, buried, raised and ascended into heaven. In other words "He was going away." So there are two stories explaining how His disciples should live until He returns from heaven. The story of the ten virgins emphasizes "watchfulness." Notice in verse 13 where watchfulness, readiness, and suddenness. The second story is about working for Him or service for Him. In another passage (Luke 19:13) the words are, "do business or occupy yourself in my kingdom enterprise."

When one becomes a follower of Jesus they are equipped with talents to serve. They are to be productive citizens of his kingdom. These tools are often spoken of as gifts, spiritual gifts, or graces. Someone has categorized these gifts in three groups:

Motivational gifts. Romans 12:8 identifies two of these gifts, "encouragement" and "giving" The gift of encouragement is manifested when a Christian seems to be able to lift up a person by their words. They are able to give hope and strength to people. Giving will exhibit when a believer give so generously and joyfully. Manifestation gifts are noted in I Corinthians 12:28 where "miracles and healing" are mentioned. Then in Ephesians 4:11 there are Ministry gifts such as being a pastor or an evangelist.

Acknowledging that each believer in Christ received at least one spiritual gift in the new birth event let us turn our attention to the three servants who were given material matter to use while the master was away. The expectation was that they would be productive i.e. do business for the Master and expand His work. Jesus said they were given "start up" money to begin.

Let me first explain my interpretation of a talent in terms of what that might mean in today's market. I was led to believe that the unit of money called a talent might represent the life time earning of most people in Jesus' day. On the internet I learned that the average American who works 30 to 65 years earns a little under \$2,000,000. With the economic downturn and my desire not to exaggerate I whittled that down to \$1,000,000. With that in mind servant number one was given \$5,000,000 dollars to invest.

- Let's call him Dandy Dave...You've met him, in the high school year book he was voted the "Most Likely to Succeed." He is the one that could sell a refrigerator to an Eskimo. He was an eager beaver, a go getter, highly motivated, a visionary, an innovator, and a self-starter. So he not only covered the overhead, but multiplied the investment five times, \$5 million dollars!

HIS REWARD—"The joy of his boss." V.21 "I'm going to give you more responsibility. In most churches we think of giving jobs to someone that doesn't have one but actually the person who is going to get things done is the one who is already busy. I understand the possibility of burnout, but the person who serves in the strength provided from the Lord will succeed.

- Now let's meet Consistent Cecil. The Boss knows that he doesn't have the ability or capacity of Dandy Dave, but he is dependable. He will give it his best shot. He knew he was loyal, he would show up. He's a plodder and he will stay at the job. Well, the Master was very perceptive and Consistent Cecil came through. He doubled the two million to four million. HIS REWARD...based on his experience and diligence he was promoted to a higher level of responsibility, "many things."
- But not we come to FEARFUL FELIX. He probably would have been happy for no responsibility. I can just see him wringing his hands and say, "These are tough days, my friends have lost money in real estate, their cattle died for lack of water, the vineyards suffered from an early freeze. I will not take a risk. I'll hide the talent." Wow! The master seemed like a capitalist, a regular Donald Trump. "You could have made something even putting your money in a CD. Besides that you distorted my image. You turned me into a stiff, stern, severe person. You should know that I am generous, forgiving, and understanding. You're fired. I have met enough Fearful Felix folk. Sadly sometimes I've let them have their way. Their phrases are worn out steps to stagnation.

They talk like this:

We've never done it that way.

We've tried that and it failed.

It won't work.

That's not my responsibility.

It can't be done.

It's not my fault.
We might fail.

But still they maintain they walk by faith...Please don't say that if you are unwilling to trust the Master while you are unwilling to walk by faith. Charles Spurgeon said, "In every trade there is a risk."

The lesson of this story is timeless. I want to put it in very sophisticated, theological and business phraseology. Are you ready? Sit up and listen to what the lesson is: "Brothers and Sisters, You either use it or you lose it." Churches are like warehouses of energy yet to be used. Use it or lose it is a law of life.

When I was in high school I was a pretty fair bowler. I would bowl four or five games three times a week. When you do that you can take care of those one, two or three pins that are left standing from your first ball. You can whisper to that front pin or shove a pin so it leans on another pin and pick up that spare. But if we were to go bowling tonight, my biggest prayer would be, "Lord, keep me out of the gutter!" How many of you took a foreign language in high school? Can you still remember the language? Use it or lose it.

THERE WAS ANOTHER SERVANT IN THIS STORY...THE STORY TELLER, JEHOVAH'S SERVANT - JESUS He is the Master of the universe. He gave his all for us. His life, His blood, and His body. [The communicator can apply Philippians 2 concerning the kenosis of Jesus.

Perhaps the story seems to be too pointed. Please read this coming week the 15th chapter of John. "I am the Vine you are the branches." My father wants you to abide in me and bear fruit, more fruit and much fruit. If I forget his ordination of me as a fruit bearer there may be the need for pruning.

Closing verse: Ephesians 2:10 "We are His workmanship...created to do good works."