

## **Putting one's talents to good use**

There are words in the English language that are used regularly, if not daily, but the meanings of which are not really understood. One such word is talent. We speak about a person's talent in terms of their natural ability, skill or gift. We might think that a talented person is one who is superior to others possibly in sport or in music or in academic performance. Talented people appear on television or feature in newspapers and magazines. Many talented people earn large sums of money particularly if their special talent can be demonstrated in football or in basketball or in the movies.

But what is the origin of the word talent and does it have any special meaning? A talent was a coin or weight that was used in ancient Greek and Roman times some two to three thousand years ago. A talent was a form of money. If you possessed one of these coins, then you had a talent. If you were fortunate to have many coins, then you had many talents. I am sure that you can now see the modern meaning of terms like 'multi-talented' or 'limited talent'.

The word talent can be found in one of the most famous stories in the Bible, the Parable of the Talents, as told in Chapter 25 of St. Matthew's Gospel. A parable is a short, simple story from which we might learn a lesson that can be applied in our lives. The Parable of the Talents tells of a wealthy man with three servants who was leaving his home to go on a long journey. He summoned the three servants who were to remain in his house whilst he was away and who would be responsible for his business affairs and possessions. To one servant he gave five talents, to another servant two talents, and to the third one talent, each according to their ability. The Master then went on his journey, leaving his servants with an instruction; put the talents I gave you to good use.

The servant who had received the five talents immediately went and put his money to good use and in the process gained five more talents. In the same way, the servant who was entrusted with two talents managed to gain two more. But the servant who had received one talent went out and dug a hole in the ground and buried his Master's money.

After a long time, the Master of the house returned from his journey and summoned the servants. The one who had received the five talents said 'Sir, you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' His Master answered, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful in a few things and now I will reward you by putting you in charge of many things.'

The servant with the two talents was also eager to see his Master. He said, 'Sir, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more.' His Master answered also saying, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things and now I will reward you by putting you in charge of many things.'

Then the servant who had received the one talent came and said, 'Sir, I was afraid of you, so I went and hid your talent in the ground'. The servant then returned the one talent to his Master. But his Master answered, 'Evil and lazy servant! You should have put the

talent to good use and not hidden it in the ground. The Master then gave the one talent to the servant who had the ten talents.

This is a simple story but one that does leave us a little confused. The two servants who were able to multiply their Master's money were commended as "good and faithful servants" and rewarded with increased responsibilities in their Master's service. Both were invited to share in their Master's joy.

The Master's response to the third servant, however, is a very different matter. This servant told his Master that he was a harsh and cruel man, and that is why he was afraid to take a risk with any kind of investment. So he hid the money, preferring to return it later without any gain. The Master's response was to cast this servant into great darkness.

There is a powerful point to this parable, that is, there are different outcomes that come from faithful service and unfaithful service. Faithful service leads to increased responsibilities in the Kingdom of Heaven, and eternal joy in the presence of the Master, that is, Jesus Christ. Unfaithful service will lead to condemnation, and an eternity that is spent in darkness, away from the presence of our Lord. One must surely conclude that this parable is not just an interesting story, but a message of eternal significance.

We might feel that the third servant was treated very harshly. After all, he did hide his Master's money and gave it back when he returned from his journey. He did not steal the money nor did he lose it through careless action. The point of the story, however, is that the third servant was given a talent yet did not use it.

How many times do we encounter this story here at St. Paul's? Each of you has talent but how do you use that talent? Do you invest the talent in order to reap greater rewards? Or do you sit on your talent, opting not to use it but letting it stay idle? It matters not if you are multi-talented or have only a little talent. Unless you use fully the talent that you have been blessed to possess then you will not live a rich and rewarding life. A person that makes good use of their limited talent will be seen favourable in the eyes of your Lord. However, a person with many talents who decides to let their talent go to waste will not be looked upon favourable in the Kingdom of Heaven.

If you possess only a small amount of talent, yet are willing to use that talent in order to reap greater rewards, then you will be putting to good use the special gift that the Lord has given. By so doing will you live a rich and faithful life.