

Giving Part 2 - JAN 2018

Marquis de Lafayette was a French officer who provided invaluable assistance to George Washington and the struggling American army during the American war of Independence. After the war was over, he returned to France and resumed his life as a farmer of many estates. In 1783, the harvest was a terrible one, and there were many who suffered as a result. Lafayette's farms were unaffected by the devastating crop failures. One of his workers offered what seemed to be good advice to Lafayette, "The bad harvest has raised the price of wheat. This is the time to sell." After thinking about the hungry peasants in the surrounding villages, Lafayette disagreed and said, "No, this is the time to give."

Epiphany is when I preach on giving and I alternate between money and other talents - and this is the second part of a sermon on financial giving. Last week, we learned that giving is not a tax nor a tip - It's a tithe - a certain amount given to say to God: "*I know this is all yours. You have entrusted it to me. I am managing it for you and for your kingdom. Here is the first fruits of my labour. Without You, none of this would be possible.*" It is an attitude of the heart. We considered 5 reasons why giving is so important that are in your notes, recognising that it all comes down to learning to trust God rather than having our security in money.

We then looked at the parable of the talents in which there are 7 principles of giving. The first four are in your notes and here is the fifth.

Giving Principle #5 - ___ACCOUNTABILITY___ - when I report the results of how I've done.

"After a long time the master ... returned and settled accounts with them." (Matthew 25:19b)

There will come a time when Christ will return and *he will settle accounts* with us! How have we done? Have we managed the resources he has entrusted to us as if they belong to him for his benefit and His kingdom? Or have we used them just for ourselves? Jesus says there will be a day of accounting. Let's manage each day with that in mind!

Giving Principle #6 - ___PROBATION___ - the reward of being entrusted with more *based on my faithfulness.*

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"

(Matthew 25:21,23)

When you think about eternal life do you think of it as eternally floating on clouds playing harps? BORING! God has work for us to do. We don't know what it will be but it will be fulfilling, God-designed work that will give us an eternal purpose.

Jesus tells us that our responsibilities in Heaven will be based on how well we do with what we've been given here on Earth. Notice that even though one servant received 5 talents and another only 2 talents, that their reward in Heaven was *exactly the same!* Are you handling your resources now as if you are on probation? Do you understand that how you handle your affairs here on Earth will play an important part in what you are entrusted with for eternity?

Giving Principle #7 - ___RISK___ - the understanding that safety and growth are incompatible.

“So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.” (Matthew 25:25)

Are we like this servant who really didn't understand what was required of him. Do we believe that safety is the most important thing? We pray that God will keep us safe. But Jesus teaches that safety and growth are incompatible! Growth requires risk!

Why don't we want to take risks? Because we are afraid. The third servant admits his fear: *“So I was afraid and hid your talent...”* Here's something we need to remember about risk: when we take real risks, we will be afraid. Risk and fear go hand in hand. John Wimber used to say that faith is spelt RISK. When we give selflessly instead of holding back, we learn to place our faith in God and not in ourselves or our own resources. When Jesus taught this parable he taught both sides of the story - not only the two faithful servants, but also the unfaithful one. The one who hid the talent in the ground. Here Jesus shows us how important this lesson really is. Jesus shows us what's at stake!

What's at stake:

#1. Loss of my ___REPUTATION___.

“You wicked, lazy servant!” (Matthew 25:26)

Jesus does not mince words. He describes the third servant as wicked. As lazy. Sometimes we think of being lazy as just the absence of work.

But Jesus says the heart's motivation of the lazy person is evil, wicked. Why? Because the servant presumes that he has the choice of working or not working. That, however, is the choice of the master - not the servant. What reputation do we want to have at the end? The one of a faithful servant entering into our Master's happiness? Or the one of the lazy servant who wouldn't take the risk of putting his resources to good use for the Master?

Jim Elliot was a young missionary who was killed by the Waodani tribe in Ecuador in January 1956. Later the very men who killed him became Christians themselves because of his sacrifice. Several years before Elliot wrote, *“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”* Are we giving now what we cannot keep in order to gain what we can never lose?

#2. Loss of my ___ORIGINAL GIFT___.

“Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents... Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.” (Matthew 25:28, 29b)

Jesus takes the story one step farther. The only talent given to the third servant is taken away from him and given to the first servant! One of the things that is at stake is the very gift I was given in the first place. What is it that you are good at doing? What do you see as “yours” as “your ability” as “what makes you special?” If you use it for God's kingdom, unselfishly sharing it with others, then God will give you even more. But if you keep it to yourself, even what you have will be taken!

#3. Loss of my ___FELLOWSHIP WITH THE MASTER___.

“And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 25:30)

This is the greatest tragedy of Jesus' entire parable: LOSS OF FELLOWSHIP with the Master. This is what *“outside - into the darkness - weeping and gnashing of teeth”* mean. This is what it will be like for those who are deprived of fellowship with the Master.

(This is a big subject that there is not time to go into this morning, but if you want to look into it yourselves Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 3 is a good place to start.)

Conclusion: Over these past two weeks we have talked about the very heart of the character of God - he is a giver. No one gives like he does. If we want to be like God, then we need to be a giver. The parable of the talents shows us 7 principles to be a giver like God. It is a great parable because it is not hard to understand what Jesus was trying to say. We probably all know how to be a giver but do we do it?

Illustration - I want you to imagine that you are a solitary traveler in a lonely desert. As you travel, you become very thirsty. Just ahead you see a rusty old pump at the edge of an oasis with water underground. Attached to the pump is a note that reads, “I have buried a bottle of water to prime the pump. Do not drink any of it. Pour 1/2 to wet the leather gasket. Wait and then pour the rest to prime the pump. When you have drawn your fill of water, refill the bottle and bury it in the sand for the next traveller.” --- Will you drink the water from the bottle or follow the instructions? Will you only worry about your own thirst and drink the bottle dry? Or will you pour every drop of the water into the pump? The dilemma is this: do you trust the note and take the risk OR do you take care of your own needs?

Jesus gave us the note that will take care of us and others too. That's what this Parable of the Talents really is all about. We give everything we have to God and His kingdom because it all belongs to Him. And we trust God to take care of us and our needs along the way. **Let's pray.**