

Five Talents Worth of Stock in Edsel

(MATTHEW 25:14-30 NIV) *“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’ ²¹“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!’ ²²“The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’ ²³“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!’ ²⁴“Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ ²⁶“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. ²⁸“So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

I have several sermons planned on this parable; so, we'll get to know it pretty well. We may get sick of it! If it were made into a movie, which role would you play? With which character do you most closely identify: the one with five talents? the one with two? one? the master? Maybe you don't connect at all; you'd be a neighbor, watching the whole thing over the back fence.

A couple of questions came to mind. First, *why did that last guy get only one talent?* I know the text says, "...each according to his ability," but I think I'd have been "ticked". I generally think I can handle about as much as the next guy, in most things. I'd have wondered, "Does the Master think I can't handle it? Does he think I'm incompetent? Doesn't he trust me? Does he have favorites? I think I'd have a burr under my saddle!

And another question: "What if any one of those servants had lost what the Master gave him? "Master, you entrusted me with five talents. I bought five talents worth of stock in Edsel; I lost my shirt—and your money. I return empty-handed."

Now, for you young 'whipper-snappers' in the crowd, the Edsel was a car developed in 1958 by Ford. It was supposed to revolutionize the automobile industry;

it was to be a technological marvel; the proto-typical car of the future, and General Motors and Chrysler would be scurrying around for years, trying to catch up with Ford. It was a miserable flop, and Ford—and everybody who invested in Edsel—lost a bundle! What if one of the Master's servants had invested in something like Edsel, and lost his shirt?

Not every speculative investment pays off! In fact, in today's economy, there aren't many secure investments! How can we make this parable meaningful today, when the economy is so bad, and yet, two of three men in the story doubled their investments? Can you imagine the risks they took?

You know, I'll bet that's what was going on in the mind of that third servant—the one who buried the money: "What if I lose it?" I guess that puts me in the category of the one-talent guy. How about you?

It's hard to escape the conviction that the story was told mainly for him. In my observation a majority of people consider themselves one-talent people (or no-talent people). There are only a few poets like Keats; only a few inventors like Edison; only a few statesmen like Lincoln or preachers like Peter Marshall; or businessmen like Steve Jobs.

So, some people just give up. What's the use? The five-talent people of the world are going to make all the rules, anyway (you know; the "golden rule": he who has the gold makes the rules!); and as long as we have to play by their rules, we don't have a chance. I'll just sit here in my rocking chair and hope nobody notices me." And, sure enough, nobody notices. A candle hidden under a basket flickers and sputters as it consumes the last of the oxygen under the basket.

In a brightly lit room, a candle in the corner will go unnoticed. But on a stormy night, when the electricity goes off, *one small candle* beside the crib changes the whole complexion of a dark, frightened room.

In the parable, the one-talent man discounted his one, lonely candle: hid it under a basket; said he was scared he'd lose it... But whatever his rationalization, listen to the judgment: "You wicked, lazy servant!"

In the context of the whole New Testament, I think the following interpretations are in order:

First, the amount received by any one of the servants is irrelevant. They each could have received one—or ten—talents; the story would have been the same. Or, the story could have been reversed: the one-talent and two-talent men could have doubled their money, and the five-talent man could have buried his. The story wouldn't change. The point is: one servant did nothing with what he had. How much or how little is not relevant.

But there's another approach. I truly believe that had any of the servants

returned saying, "I invested my talents in Edsel stock and lost my shirt," the reply would have been, "Well, at least you've got guts. I'll give you a scholarship to Harvard. You go and earn a degree in business and investments—match that courage with some skill and knowledge. Then come back. We'll try it again."

You see, this isn't a parable about succeeding or failing. It's one of three parables in succession about the Kingdom of Heaven. And if the New Testament teaches anything about the Kingdom, it is that the kingdom is not built on the success or failure of its citizens.

This is a story about faith. It's about two servants who trusted their Master's grace. Oh, there were rumors: the Master had a reputation for 'reaping where he'd not sown'. The world is full of people who preach "God's-gonna'-getcha!" But two servants trusted the master, anyway; trusted him enough to use what he gave them.

And, while the parable is not about succeeding or failing, I think it is significant in the parable that NO EFFORT ON BEHALF OF THE MASTER FAILED.

Do you believe that? Do you believe it enough to dig up that talent—that gift—that God entrusted to your care, that you buried years ago? The five-talent people and the two-talent people are doing their part. It's not quite enough, is it? There are just too few of them, and we're gradually losing ground. Never before has the church—never before has this congregation—needed one-talent people (because there's just so many of us) more than it needs us now.

So, here's what I propose: when you leave here this morning, each of you will be given one talent. Oh, you won't have any trouble recognizing it; it will look an awful lot like a one dollar bill. You will be "*entrusted*" with one talent.

As soon as possible after Labor Day we'll have a Fellowship event. At that event we'll have a time of accounting. How will you handle your talent? Will you double it—or more? Or will you bury it?

It's just a dollar? Well, I am aware of nine times this project has been undertaken, in seven churches. In every case the initial investment was increased many times over. We'll designate the return to some special project in the church.

Let me share how some have dealt with their "talent." One man added a few dollars of his own and went to a junk store and bought an old lawn mower for six or seven dollars. He rebuilt the carburetor and replaced the head gasket. With parts included, he had eleven or twelve dollars invested in the mower, in addition to the one "talent" he had received at church. He sold the lawn mower for \$75.00, and with the \$75.00 he bought seven more old lawn mowers and rebuilt them. He turned in almost \$500.

One man added money from his pocket and bought step-down filters. He quit

smoking and upped his regular church pledge by the amount he would have spent on cigarettes for the rest of the year. That was in 1978, and amounted to \$300.00.

Some have done arts and crafts or baked goods, and sometimes we've had an auction. Some have pooled their resources. Some have auctioned off services: a thirty-minute airplane flight; a sunset dinner cruise on a sailboat or party barge.

Let your imagination go. Have fun with it. Multiply your talent; and when we get together after Labor Day, perhaps we can say to everyone: "Well done, good and faithful servants!"