



Investing in our vision

Matthew 25:14-30

One of the most vivid and memorable of Jesus' parables, this remarkable story offers profound and searching challenges about our attitudes to the resources God places at our disposal. It begins with a man gathering his servants together before departing for a journey. He allocates an amount of money to each on them, depending on their ability. The Greek word *talanton* refers to a weight of precious metal: even one 'talent' represented half the amount of money which a labourer would earn in a lifetime. One talent is a substantial sum, five talents represent an enormous amount of cash.

This is one of three parables in Matthew 25, each concerned with the future coming of Jesus and the manner in which he will judge the actions of his followers. Matthew 25:19 tells us that 'after a long time the master of those servants returned,' what seems to be a clear reference to Jesus' second arrival on earth. In this case, his assessment of his disciples is based on how they have used the resources given to them.

The first two servants in this story have taken risks but seen significant rewards for doing so. Each of them generates a remarkable 100 per cent return on their investment, actions which earn the approval of their Master. Intriguingly, verse 21 seems to suggest that the reward for acting so creatively and resourcefully is not to receive a generous pension plan but to be given more responsibility!

Tragically, the third servant, having played it safe, is met only with judgement by the master. We can only imagine that he rationalised his actions as sensible and prudent, a cautious approach that minimised risk. However, there is nothing to show as a result of his actions, no return on the master's investment.

The servant's excuse for his extreme caution only seems to make matters worse. He acknowledges that he has acted out of fear, accusing the master of being 'a hard man.' The master's response, in verses 26 and 27, is a sobering reminder of the responsibilities we have to do our best with what God has given us. As one commentator notes, '... even if God is not unreasonable and exploitative, the parable as a whole emphasises that he makes exacting demands on his people. He is not to be fobbed off with a lame excuse.'¹

While we cannot escape the challenge of this story, we also need to read it as an encouragement from God as well. Those who take risks find themselves commended by the Master and are invited to 'share his happiness' (verses 21 and 23). Do we realise that in holding on tightly to what we have we might be denying ourselves the best God has for us? Do we grasp that the way of risk is the one which offers more rewards than we might dream of? Do we understand that if we want our church to grow, we will only see this happen if we are willing to act with boldness and courage?

For discussion

1. Can you think of a time when SBC, or another church you've been part of, has taken what seems like a risky decision only to find itself blessed? What might have happened if the risk had been avoided?
2. How do you respond to the portrayal of God which we find in the figure of the Master in this story?
3. In verse 29, the Master uses words almost identical to what Jesus himself says in Matthew 13:12: 'For 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.' On Sunday, Trevor compared this saying to our English proverb, 'Nothing succeeds like success.' What lessons does this verse teach us about the sort of churches God uses most powerfully?
4. What do you think this story teaches us about the impact we could see if we decide to invest significantly in our building and the future of our church?

¹ RT France, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew*, 2007, p956