USING OUR GOD-GIVEN ABILITIES by Bret Miller

In Matthew 24, Jesus is asked about the signs of the end of the age. Jesus then spoke for a long time of many different subjects, answering what the kingdom of heaven will be like in the end. One of those descriptions involved one master and three servants. In the parable of the talents, the master gave each servant a certain amount of money according to his ability. To one the master gave five talents, to another two, and to another one talent. There is some speculation over the value of this particular form of currency. From what I have briefly researched, one talent of silver could be worth nearly twenty years of income. Whatever the case, the amount of money with which the master entrusts each servant is quite remarkable, especially considering the fact that the master then ups and leaves for a long time. If you know the story, you know that the five-talent and two-talent servants both got to work to make the money grow, whereas the one-talent servant just hid his in the ground for safekeeping. The text says that each was given talents according to his ability, so the number of talents is representative of each slave’s ability.

Eventually, the master returns and he sees that the five-talent and two-talent servants have both doubled the money given to them. The master rewards them both equally, saying, “Well done, my good and faithful servant. You’ve been faithful over a few things, but I will put you in charge of many. Enter into the joy of your master.” Meanwhile the one-talent man is probably wondering how he is going to pass this assignment. He has done nothing except hide his talent in the ground, and the master tells him that he is wicked and lazy for it. The one-talent man is thrown by the master outside into the darkness.

Do the talents just represent ability? If so, is our application really just to make ourselves more talented? Can the talents represent souls or perhaps good deeds? However we interpret the meaning behind the talents, whether it be the ones God gives or what we produce, I think we can safely say that God gives us talent and we are to use that talent for good. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus tells us not to hide our light but to let it shine to bring glory to our Father in heaven. What are we doing with what God gives us?

Why does the one-talent man hide his money? The man claims he did it out of fear. The master calls him wicked and lazy. Is the master God? If so, does God gather where he does not sow or scatter? Rather, the wicked and lazy servant had no relationship with his master to know that he is a good master. The servant claims that the master was too difficult, that he was a hard man, and that he feared him. But I think the master calls him out on it and basically says, “Oh, so I’m a hard man? Well, if that is the case, you would have at least done the bare minimum to please me.” (Mt. 25:26-27 NIBMV- Not Inspired Bret Miller Version). To go along with this point, as the reader, who do you think we are supposed to trust? The unfaithful man or the master who gives so generously? Verses 28-29 have always bothered me. I think about God taking from someone who doesn’t have much and giving it to someone who already has plenty seems a bit backward. So how are we to understand what the master is saying here? I think the main message is that great faithfulness yields great reward. And I have peace of mind knowing that God is a perfect judge.

**Applications:**

• You can’t change what you start with, but you can change what you end with. I teach a leadership class for high school students, and I am handed a curriculum to teach. For a couple of weeks, we talked about the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. The idea being that you are more successful if—when you face challenges and fail—you keep trying and change your mindset to say, “I can’t do this yet.” This brings some good results and there’s data to back it up. I think it’s a good mindset to a certain extent. At the risk of sounding like I have a fixed mindset, I can confidently say, “I am not good enough to play in the NBA.” Adding “yet” to that statement does absolutely no good. I have not been given the talents to do so. This is not an excuse, this is reality. In life, we’ve been given talents, but we have ceilings in certain areas. If the one-talent man works just as hard as the five-talent man, he will never catch up. I’m not saying that to discourage anyone but to help us understand the reality of the situation. We all have different abilities/gifts given by God and they’re all important.

• To view everyone as having equal talents/abilities/gifts is inaccurate and, I think, detrimental to knowing how we can view and help other people. You may be a two-talent or a five-talent individual. Encourage the one-talent. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says to “encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”

• Don’t think because you’re doing the work of a one-talent man that you’re living up to your potential. We’re not working against each other, we’re working for the master. Stop comparing yourself to other talents and serve the master.

• At times the world says it is shameful to be submissive to or to serve other people. But the slaves served the master. We are to be slaves of righteousness, not sin. Don’t be afraid to call yourself a bondservant of God.

• Many people might see the one-talent man as justified because he was given something and gave the exact same thing back. This is typical of the “I’m ok you’re ok, don’t bother me if I’m doing nothing. Let me live my life my way,” mentality. This is not acceptable in the kingdom of heaven.

• Both the five-talent and two-talent man did not procrastinate in doing the master’s (God’s) work. When God speaks, the faithful obey immediately. You don’t know when Jesus is coming back, so get to work.

• Don’t be like the one-talent man and re-work in your mind the nature of God to fit your liking or to use as an excuse for apathy.

• When we consider the value of a talent, even the one-talent man still received a lot of money/talent. You’re capable of quite a bit with what God gives you.

• Too often, we compare ourselves to other people with jealousy in our hearts instead of appreciating just how much we’ve been given.

• I see the grace of God by entrusting so much to people who are equivalent to slaves. Our status is completely different in comparison to God, but he expects us to be faithful.

• Being “faithful over a little” (when “a little” is at least a hundred years of income for the five-talent man) doesn’t seem like “a little,” but it illustrates how much God give us as our reward. How great that reward must be!