

# Matthew part 4 – the challenge then and the challenge now

For some people Christianity resembles some kind of heavenly examination system – make sure you study the syllabus now, do certain things and keep certain rules – and one day you will be rewarded – or not, as the case may be.

Matthew 25 14 -40 seems to reinforce this – in the parable of the talents. Luke 19 has a similar parable.

The three servants are given stewardship over the Master's property and of varying sizeable amounts of money. Each according to his ability.

Put together this was a considerable stewardship – a single talent was worth about 16 years of daily wages.

Why can we say it was a stewardship? Because the Master mandated or entrusted them to manage his affairs- in his interests.

The Master doesn't say – 'I expect you to employ these funds to manage and improve my property until I return. He doesn't need to, because that is what being a steward involves.

# Whose property?

So whose property - and talents are these ?

Answer : the property and the talents always belonged to the Master. And on his return they will still belong to the Master. That is key.

Perhaps I should ask myself a question? What do I “have” that is “mine”. I think I know the answer.

Knowing who owns the property and the talents should help take a certain weight off our shoulders. Of course, there is my responsibility as regards them – we clearly see that for the servants - and accountability – but it’s at different level. I am not the owner.

Some Christians appear to be always asking questions around what they should be doing., or how they should spend their lives. Many spend their lives internalising the question.

Here is a thought. If we, like the two servants, have our full attention on the furtherance of the interests of our Master, everything changes. And then , whether we sweep a floor or run a multinational corporation, the “what and how” question is answered for us. And the bonus is the “bad stress” pressure should be off us?

# The failed steward

- What is clear about this parable is that it is as much about Israel and its leaders and their relationship with God as it is about anything else.
- It helps if we remember that Matthew is “a whole”. Once we do that we recognise that both the Sermon on the Mount, and these last chapters—especially 23 which links to this—are zeroing in on the third servant. The same servant who had been given so much - but who had done nothing with it. It is the same servant (who was not a servant in his actions) who had done the opposite to advancing the Master’s interests.
- ALL their pointing to the Temple or Torah, or to their descent from Abraham was not going to compensate for what they had done with the truth of God. They had missed the mark completely – the tax-collectors and prostitutes were going into the Kingdom ahead of them. It is sobering stuff this.

# And the faithful servants?

- They are the other two who - simply put – work to usher in the Kingdom- through their loyalty to God’s purposes and by using his given talents to serve those purposes.
- Remember the offer of Jesus? We can exchange slavery for family through the price paid on our behalf.
- Matthew 11: 28 -30. “28. come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. 30. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”
- And that is the context in which we now work. Those are the purposes we need to have uppermost in our minds and actions.
- Jesus, God with us , will return , and, yes, he will assess what we as Christians have done.

# The work done will be revealed

- 1 Corinthians 3 :10-15 and 2 Corinthians 5.10.
- God's building – and working in his Kingdom . The works that will indicate a wise and competent builder has been at work – because they stand the test and those that are found to be less than robust - on “the day”.
- How should we go about extending the Kingdom?
  1. Remember whose Kingdom it is
  2. Sweep the floor or manage the multinational
  3. DO so with confidence and humility
- 3. is beautifully summed up in the following statement “It isn't a matter of knowing that you have got it all together. You haven't. It's a matter of knowing that somewhere it IS altogether – and that you're part of it.”