

DISPRPORTIONAL

We hear so much about equality these days. Everyone is supposed to be equal, not just equal before the law, but also equal in prosperity, health, and opportunity. The Bible does teach that we are all of equal value before God. He loves each of us the same, enough to have given His only begotten Son to redeem us. We are all equally sinners, having been born into a fallen human race, and we will all face the same the same parameters of judgment.

But the Bible also teaches that we are not all equal, and our experience bears this out. Some people are short, others tall. Some are talented artistically, others mechanically, and still others relationally. Some have a strong constitution, others fall prey to any illness that comes along. Some are born in industrialized nations, others in third world countries. These are things over which we have little control.

The Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25 teaches both equality and inequality. That the servants were given differing amounts of money (or talents) speaks of inequality. What they did with it was not the same. I imagine the amount of effort required in the investment of five talents was considerably more than what was needed to invest two. The results were not the same in terms of raw data, but both of the faithful servants got an equal return percentage-wise – both doubled their master's money.

The unfaithful servant's behavior was vastly different from the other two. From whatever motive, he evidently considered his one talent (which was no measly amount of money – a talent was the equivalent of fifteen years' wages) as not worth his effort. He claimed he was afraid he might lose it and the master would be unhappy because he hadn't gained anything. The master saw through his excuse and was indeed angry, less because there was no gain and more because of lack of effort. He did not insist on the same return as the other servants; even bank interest would have been enough.

What this says to me is that whatever I have been given, no matter whether great or small, I am called to use it to the best of whatever ability I have. It is worth the effort, because the greatest disparity is yet to be revealed in the parable.

At the reckoning the two faithful servants were commended by the master, no small accolade considering the master in the story represents God. To receive His commendation, His affirmation of my paltry efforts on His behalf, is more than all human applause combined. When I consider His omnipotence compared to my puny abilities, I am stunned that He would condescend to entrust the advancement of his kingdom to us humans at all. We can do so little compared to what He can do.

The master not only commended the faithful servants, but he also gave them a promotion, so to speak. "You were faithful in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things" (Matt. 25:21,23). It doesn't say how many, so the inequality (based on how much each had been given previously) in the midst of equality (a promotion for both) may be assumed. Doubtless the five-talent servant was put in charge of more than the two-talent servant.

And finally, the master does something for which I don't have an adequate definition. "Enter into the joy of your master." What is this in today's terminology? It's obvious that the master was pleased with the two faithful servants, because he commended them. What more is he conferring now in this?

When I think of sharing joy with someone, I think of intimacy. The people who are closest to me, whom I love the most, are the ones whose joy I can most readily share. When my son-in-law received an award for one of his designs, I beamed with pride. When my grandchildren achieve each new step of development, my joy knows no bounds. To share in the joy of my Master is to know Him better, to have a closer relationship with Him, to be drawn into His circle of confidence.

King Solomon wrote, "The devious are an abomination to the Lord, but He is intimate with the upright" (Prov. 3:22). Now, since the advent of our Lord, we know we are more than just close friends with God; we are family. The Apostle Paul wrote, "You have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:15-17). And it's not just that we are on the same level with Christ, it's more than that. We are *in* Christ (Eph. 2:6) and He is *in* us (Col. 1:27). That is a level of intimacy we as humans cannot fathom.

The unfaithful servant lost it all. Where the others received commendation, he received condemnation. "You wicked, lazy slave," his master said. His one talent was taken from him. And he was not just demoted; he was thrown out altogether. He would no longer be in the service of his master at all, but completely and totally estranged from him. Far from sharing his master's joy, he would experience "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30). This is especially sobering, considering that in the previous parable, the Ten Virgins, the five unprepared virgins were outside and not let in. This unfaithful servant was inside and then thrown out. Making use of what we have been given in Christ is no inconsequential matter.

In Christ, we all have been given riches beyond our wildest dreams. The very least-gifted servant of Christ is still incredibly wealthy. The disproportion is not between who has more gifts and who has fewer. In light of what we have in Christ, that difference is negligible. The real disproportion is between what God can do and what we can do, and between the consequences of our action or failure to act on what we have been given. Our Master does not require equality of us. We do not all have to be Billy Grahams, but we are all called to invest His immense riches in others so that He might gain the more.

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