

The Parable of the Talents

In 27 B.C., Augustus Caesar became the ruler of the Roman Empire. Petty kings came from near and far to plead for reappointment to their kingdoms.

Among them was Herod, king of the Jews. He had to leave his kingdom temporarily in the hands of others while he sought to continue his rule. Those to whom he entrusted the kingdom were responsible to Herod for how they administered the kingdom in his absence. If they did poorly and he was returned to power, they stood to suffer. If they served him well but Herod was not reinstated, they stood to suffer from Herod's enemies.

The best solution was to be absolutely loyal to the side to which they were committed, and at least they would be able to do whatever they did in good conscience.



Jesus told a story that may have been based on just such an event. A man had to go away for a while and he entrusted his goods to his servants. To one, he entrusted five talents; to another, two talents; and to another, one talent. A talent was a measurement of weight and if the item were, for example, silver, the value of the talent might be \$1,000. That may not sound like an enormous sum to us in our inflationary times, but consider that as recently as 2005, the average worker in India earned 91 cents an hour. So \$1,000 would have been equal to a year of income.

Similar conditions existed in Palestine when Jesus told this story. Even the man with one talent would have been considered well-endowed in the estimation of his contemporaries.

Interestingly enough, it is from this very parable that our English word *talent*, meaning “a natural gift,” has entered the language, so it is appropriate for us to read that meaning into this word, as well as other kinds of endowments. So what does this story say to us?

The first thing this parable acknowledges is that all humans do not have the same number of gifts. In the parable, one person is given five, another two and the third, one talent. And some persons' gifts are intensified because they have received them all in one field. Surely, Shakespeare must have received five in literature, Michelangelo five in art and Edison five in inventive ability.

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Some may be negative about the inequality of our endowments. Instead, let us be positive about what we can do with what we have. In a popular children's story, *Stone Soup*, some hungry soldiers came into a town looking for food. Everyone in the town was afraid to share, so they claimed to have no food. The soldiers got a huge kettle, and began to stir.

When the curious townspeople asked the soldiers what they were doing, they answered that they were making stone soup. "This soup is delicious," said one soldier, tasting the soup. "What it needs is a little cabbage." One villager said, "Well, I can provide a cabbage," which he did.

Item by item, the soldiers told the curious villagers what would make the soup better – a few carrots, some celery, turnips, potatoes, onions, salt, parsley. One by one, the items were brought forth.



Finally, the soldiers announced that a piece of meat would make the soup exquisite, and a family brought forth that treasure. Indeed, the soup was exquisite. All had overcome their fear, invested the one thing they had, and there was plenty for all.

The lesson is obvious: We cannot offer maximum care and service to our residents in Life Care and Century Park unless we all wholeheartedly pool the talents we have in pursuit of our mission.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace (1 Peter 4:10 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter