

## **ARE YOUR TALENTS PLANTED OR BURIED?**

**Today's Text:** Matt. 25: 14- 30

### **Extracts:**

**For the kingdom of heaven is like a man travelling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them; and to one *he gave five talents; to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability, and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five went and traded with them, and made another five talents; and likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went, and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money* [Matt. 25: 14-19].**

*When Susan Boyle appeared before a panel of judges on 11 April 2009 to audition for Britain's Got Talent, a reality television show, there was nothing about her to speak in her favour.<sup>1</sup> She was a 48-year-old choirgirl that was shaggily dressed (that is, without regard to fashion or conscious planning). But as soon as she opened her mouth to sing, she captivated everyone with her voice. Her audition video soon went viral online, attracting 120 million views in days. Her debut album "I Dreamed a Dream," was released towards the end of 2009. Already, it has sold over 3 million copies, making it the second largest-selling album for 2009. The album has been on top of the US pop album chart for a sixth consecutive week.*

*Susan's singing talent had been there since her birth forty-eight years ago. Yet, it did not surface until she came forward to try it out in a competition. In like manner, many of us are living in lack or mediocrity, not because God has not endowed us but rather because we have not discovered or developed the talents that He has given us. For example, your brilliance cannot show if you remain illiterate! So, what are you waiting for? Do you know your talents? Have you planted them like a seed or buried them like a corpse? Let us find out from this week's study.*

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<sup>1</sup> Story is based on the following sources: "Susan Boyle," *Wikipedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susan\\_Boyle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susan_Boyle) , David Meredith, "Susan Boyle's 'Dream' Provides a Wake up Call to the Music Industry," *Huffington Post*, January 4, 2010. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-meredith/susan-boyles-dream-provid\\_b\\_410530.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-meredith/susan-boyles-dream-provid_b_410530.html) and Keith Caulfield, "Susan Boyle Leads Album Chart for Sixth Week," <http://abcnews.go.com/http://abcnews.go.com/>

## 1. Background: It is a give-and-take question!

In this week's study, Jesus uses the *Parable of the Talents* to illustrate how we can lose the talents that we refuse to use. The story is about a man that was planning to travel away for a long time. He called his three servants and gave them goods to keep for him. On his return, he asked them to account for how they had used his property. Let us get into the details, using the following guide posts:

### a) *The talents belonged to the master*

It was the master that gave his servants talents to keep for him [**Matt. 25: 14**]. Therefore, the talents belonged to him and not to them. In like manner, it is God that owns the world and all that dwell in it [**Ps. 24: 1**]. He made us in His own image and likeness. Therefore, whatever talents we have come from Him.

A talent can be defined as a *natural ability* that makes us unique from other people, such as running, jumping, singing, speaking, drawing, carving, etc. All such talents are not your own, nor can you make them. They belong to God who has made them available to you to use for His purpose [**Deut. 8: 17-18**].

### b) *The talents were distributed according to the servants' ability*

We are told that the master gave ten talents to one servant, five to another and one to the third one, "to each according to his own ability" [**Matt. 25: 15**]. God does not allow waste. For example, after Jesus had miraculously fed five thousand men (excluding women and children) from five barley loaves and two small fish, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, *so that nothing is lost.*" The fragments filled twelve baskets [**Jn 6: 1-13**]. In like manner, God will not give us talents to waste but to use according to our abilities.

Abilities can be seen as the *limits of our strengths and weaknesses*, natural or cultural, within which we can exercise our talents. They can be *physical*, such as our sex, age, race or religion. Abilities could also be *psychological* or emotional, such as your attitudes. Some people are more patient than others. The talents that God will give to a patient person will be different from those for the short-tempered! Finally, abilities could be *spiritual* and good example are the gifts of the Holy Spirit [**1 Cor. 12: 4-10**]. A prophet is not the same as a person with wisdom. God will not give us beyond the full potential that we are prepared to stretch our abilities. For example, He will give less to a lazy person than to a very hardworking person. He will not give His troops to a coward to command. An illiterate can hardly become a professor in a Bible college. Therefore, do not expect

everybody to be equally endowed. Some will be more brilliant or taller or more beautiful than others. But the more brilliant or taller or more beautiful may not necessarily be equally endowed, nor will they engage in similar activities. Some will wind up richer or poorer than others, depending on how they have applied themselves while using their talents. It follows that *unless your abilities are developed to their full potential, you may never know what or how much talents God has given you.*

c) *The servants used the talents according to their choices*

When their master delivered the talents to his servants, he did not tell them what to do with them. However, each went his way and did whatever he liked with his talents. The one who had received five “went and traded with them and made another five talents.” The second also invested his two and gained two more. But the one who had received one “dug in the ground and hid his lord’s money” [Matt. 25: 16-18]!

The first two servants saw the talents as belonging to someone else who could have given them to others instead of themselves. Therefore, those talents had what economists call *opportunity costs*, that is, the value lost for giving the talents to the servants instead of investing them elsewhere. Do you know how much it costs God to make you what you are? Recall what He told Samuel the prophet after Saul had failed to completely obey His order to destroy the Amalekites, “I *greatly regret* that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me” [1 Sam. 15: 11].. God had to start afresh to make David king in place of Saul.

The third servant, on the other hand, went to hoard his master’s talent. He buried it where it could not earn any interest or be useful to anybody else. In the words of Jesus, “If you have not been faithful in what is another man’s, who will give you what is your own?” [Lk 16: 12]. Here was the servant who had received the least, apparently because his master knew his abilities- selfish, risk-averse, and lazy! The master still gave him something so that he could not be charged with partiality, just as God allows the sun to shine on both the good and the bad [Matt. 5: 45].. But the master minimized his losses by giving the third servant the least. Instead of planting it like the other two servants, he buried it.

How many people do you know around you who are everyday complaining how unfair God has been to them? They are poor and unemployed. They are sick and have no medical insurance cover. They may be homeless or living in shelters. Scratch beyond the surface and you may change your opinion about some of them. Some of them are too lazy to do anything, except to put food provided by others into their mouths! Some dropped out of school because they were afraid to take student loans to pay for their own higher education. Some even came from successful

families but squandered their privileges on unfruitful fantasies. To what extent should they blame God instead of themselves?

d) *But their day of reckoning came!*

Unexpectedly, their master came back and asked his servants to give an account. The one who had received five talents gladly reported how he had doubled what he had received. His master told him, “Well done, *good and faithful* servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.” He said a similar thing to the second servant that had doubled the value of his master’s talents from two to four [**Matt. 25: 19-24**].

That is how God also treats with us. When we use what He has given us to glorify Him, we receive much more from Him. For example, with the wisdom and riches that God had given to Solomon, he built a magnificent temple in Jerusalem. God was so pleased with him that “King Solomon surpassed *all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom*. Now all the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart” [**1 Kgs 10: 23-24**]. He was faithful over a few things and God made him ruler over many things- *at least up to that stage of his life!*

But what report did the third servant have? He began by rebuking his master, saying, “Lord, I know you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.” Consequently, he had become afraid and chosen to *hoard* the master’s talent instead of investing it. Gleelessly, he concluded, “Look, there you have what is yours.” What did his master reply him? “You *wicked and lazy* servant... you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received my own with interest.” He commanded the one talent to be taken from the servant and given to him who had ten talents. He ordered the “unprofitable” servant to be cast into “outer darkness” where there would be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” [**Matt. 25: 24- 30**].

From the forgoing story, we learn a few important principles, namely:

- When God gives you talents, He will not take them away from you; *provided you plant (invest) them to continuously bear more and more fruits for His glory*. The two servants that doubled the value of the talents given to them were allowed to keep them and thus enter into the joy of their lord [**vv. 21, 23, 28**].
- When you use His talents well, more will be given you so that you will have abundance [**v. 29**]. Jesus has said elsewhere that He has chosen us to bear fruit, *the fruit that remains* so that His Father will give us whatever we ask Him [**Jn 15: 16**];

- When you bury (or misuse) the talents that God has given you, He will take the little you have and give them to those who have more [**Matt. 25: 28, 29**].

Certainly, you do not want to be in the last category but do you know where you are right now?

## 2. So what are you doing with your talents?

As long as God gives us talents according to our abilities, then what He has given us will always be enough for our needs! For example, David was a teenager not yet qualified to enter the army when God anointed Him (by the hand of the prophet Samuel) to become the next king of Israel in succession to Saul. From that time on, “the Spirit of the Lord came upon David” [**1 Sam. 16: 12-14**]. Soon after, when David brought supplies to his older brothers in the war front against the Philistines, he came face to face with Goliath, the Philistine giant. David was a bold and skilful shepherd boy that had just received the Spirit of God, but he was too small to wear Saul’s armour or to use his sword. So, how did God get him victory within his abilities? God turned David’s stone in a sling into a weapon of mass destruction! He killed Goliath and Israel defeated Philistine [**1 Sam. 17: 14-52**]. David’s talents were enough for his needs!

The question then is the extent that we make our abilities profitable for the talents that God has put in our care. Which of the following circumstances apply to you?

### a) *Are you a gardener or investor?*

A gardener (or farmer) *sees talents as seeds that need to be planted and nurtured to bear fruits*. An investor is similar; s(he) sees talents as the principal that can yield interest if carefully invested. The farmer knows that s(he) has been given good seeds.. So, s(he) will look for and prepare good soils where to plant the seeds. That way, there is the expectation that the seeds will yield more crops than planted and more seeds for a bigger farm. The investor will be careful not to invest in portfolios where s(he) could lose the principal or lower its worth. Therefore, s(he) will not be too risky.

A farmer/gardener/investor will handle God’s talents very carefully and focus on the bigger picture. For example, Peter was a simple fisherman around the Sea of Galilee. He had exceptional fishing skills, such that he could remain at sea for a whole night even when he had caught nothing. Jesus tapped that ability to make Peter “a fisher of men” [**Lk 5: 5-10**]. Yet, Peter had his weaknesses, one of which was the ability to be bold one moment and afraid the next! In the end, he became the leader of the apostles after Jesus had ascended into heaven [**Acts 1: 15; 2: 14**]. Another disciple, **Matthew**, was a tax collector who was versatile with

record keeping [Lk 5: 27]. That skill became handy for him when he chronicled the Gospel according to Matthew. Luke was a medical doctor, “the beloved physician” as Paul called him [Col. 4: 14]. He used his clinical skills to write “an orderly account” that we now today call the Gospel according to **Luke** and the Book of **Acts**. Paul, a Jew, was born a Roman citizen [Acts 22: 28] and God used him to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles in the then Roman Empire [Acts 9: 15].

How about you? Do you not know that God has made you a top politician or physician or a Nobel Prize winner for His own purposes? Do you not know that you are a top sportsman or woman, a top bus driver or a dutiful nurse or a fearless police officer because He has something that only you can do for Him? Do you not know that you are still single because there is a pressing need that only you can meet for God? If you do not know, find out!

b) *Or are you a hoarder/undertaker?*

God has given some people talents but instead of using them to glorify him, they *hijack them for their own personal ends*. When God puts you in a position of authority in government, industry or ministry and you use it to steal, kill or destroy, you are an undertaker. You are making God regret giving you such talents to keep for Him. Gehazi used the privilege of being the Prophet Elisha’s servant to corruptly take gifts from Naaman. The leprosy that left Naaman went to Gehazi and his descendants forever [2 Kgs 5: 20-27] ! Even when Judas Iscariot was a thief, Jesus made him His treasurer and he stole Christ’s ministry dry [Jn 12: 6]. In the end, he committed suicide after betraying Jesus for thirty pieces of silver [Matt. 27: 1-5]. What are you doing with God’s talents under your control?

### **3. Conclusion: Bury a seed, not a corpse!**

The talents that God has given you are to enable you to return to heaven after your tour of duty here on earth as Christ’s ambassador [2 Cor. 5: 20]. If you have planted them like seeds to grow up and bear fruits, Christ will say to you, “Well done. Enter into the joy of your Lord.” If, however, you have killed them (by using them corruptly, immorally or for self-aggrandisement, you have merely planted a corpse and I need not repeat what Christ will say!

Plant your talents. Don’t bury them!