INTRODUCTION

Hello everyone. Its good to be with you again. Always a privilege to share Gods word with you. Today we get into our third message in our series called “Stories.” If you missed the previous two, be sure to catch up online. This morning I want to look at what is called “the parable of the talents.” It is found in Matthew chapter 25 verse 14 through to 30.

Some context will help you… This story is found within a cluster of other parables that Jesus told. All back to back. One story after another. Like a story marathon. Each of these stories make very similar… yet different points.

Often these parables will start with a statement like, “The Kingdom of heaven is like…” or “The Kingdom of God is like…” and so, these stories, and the one we are about to read, are all a way to help us understand God's Kingdom. The way Gods Kingdom operates, those who are a part of his Kingdom, those who are not, the way God views the world, and the way God views you, and how He evaluates us, and me, in the light of his Kingdom.

But they all end differently… Sometimes, after a parable, Jesus would say; “Now let me explain what this means!” We found that to be the case when we looked at the parable about the sower, but at other times, Jesus would finish a parable, and simply walk away! He would just drop a story bomb… and then leave! And people would be like, “Wait… what? Please explain Jesus!”

“Stories
The short stories of Jesus

“The parable of the talents” By Neil Smith at King of Kings on Sunday 31 Jan 2016. Credits: Andy Stanley
Sometimes he would sit down with his disciples afterwards and say: “Hey guys, do you have any idea what I was talking about over there?” And they would say; “Nope. No idea!” And he would unpack it for them. In this particular parable, which we’re going to look at today, Jesus finishes telling the story, and then he just moves on to a new story! Just like that. He just keeps going…So its helpful to understand that this whole cluster of parables is connected.

Here is another thing that will be helpful about Matthew chapter 25… Depending on your bible translation, it may have different titles, “The parable of the three servants,” or “The parable of the bags of gold,” or as it is commonly known “The parable of the talents.” The word “talent” simply translated means “A measure of money.”

The story speaks in terms of gold, but it could have been anything, a measure of silver, or a measure of US dollars, or a measure of Rands… :( Yes, I know… thats a bleak thought right now! But even if our measure of Rands… measures very little now days… its still a “measure of money.” :) Eugene Peterson in his translation “The Message” puts a Talent at around $1,000 US dollars, thats R16,000, its quite a bit now, but trust me, it was huge then. So lets get into it!

MATTHEW 25:14-30

“Again, it will be like (“It” being the kingdom of heaven) a man going on a journey who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them.” (Matthew 25:14 NIV)

So, what’s important to see here… is that he did not give them his wealth… he entrusted it to them. He said, “I am going to allow you guys to manage my money while I am gone, and I am allow you to each manage different amounts, and I expect you to do with my wealth, what I would do with it.” Verse 15.

“To one he gave five bags of gold, (Or silver, or rands, or talents) to another two bags, and to another one bag, (and here’s an important phrase) each according to his ability.” (Matthew 25:15 NIV)

“Each according to his ability”… The Greek word “Dunamin” is used here, meaning strength or inner resources given by God. Each person has a different ability. So here’s is how I understand this. I will give you two examples…

My father runs his own business. He has about 30 employees. He knows that each of those people who work for him have different skill sets. Each person has different abilities. Some are good with their hands, some are good with money, some are good with people. They all have different abilities, different dunamin, different talents. You don’t give everyone the same amount of responsibility. Some can handle more than others.

Pastor John has been an incredible leader in our church, and our community. He is a man who can handle a lot of responsibility. He also has a great mind for business, and a great heart for people. God has used him to build King of Kings out of a very small congregation that used to meet in Fish Hoek… into what it is today. As a good leader, he understands this same principle. Those who are faithful with a few things, get trusted with greater responsibility. Part of the reason we have such a great staff, such great leaders, overseers and deacons, is because of God working through Pastor John.
So back to our story... just like any good boss, this man in our story, said, “Come here guys. I am going to go away on a journey. I am going to entrust you with what belongs to me. You have all got various talents. Bob. I’m going to give you five bags of gold. Steve. I’m going to give you two bags. And then you… I wont use a name in case it’s yours... You... I’m going to give you one bag! ...

Now before we start getting all critical toward the wealthy guy, just remember, like any good businessman, he knows that not all the people who work for him have the same skill set. So... according to their skills... and abilities... greek word Dunamin... he gave them the responsibility to manage his money.

Now, here is an important thing to note. Whenever you read a parable, one of the things you should always ask yourself is this...

“Where am “I” in this parable?”

Because you're in there. I'm in there. So you should be thinking, where am I in this story?

Another question to ask is,

“Where is “God” in this parable?”

Because He’s in there. I think its fairly obvious that God is the master... and that we will be one of these servants. I like how Andy Stanley puts this... He says, you and me... we’re probably “two baggers.” :) We don't get five bags, because we’re not that good, and we don’t get one bag, cause we’re better than that! So we’re probably “two baggers.” Because there is always someone whose got more than you... and there’s always someone whose got less than you. Jesus continues;

“Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold... went at once ... and put his money to work... and gained five bags more.” (Matthew 25:15-16 NIV)

So he went out, invested his money, and over time, because a long period went by, he was able to double his masters money. He went from five to ten. Ten bags of gold. Very impressive. This was no small amount of money. In Jesus’ day, people would be thinking, “Wow! That amount of gold would have immense value. You could retire immediately to a beach road plot on the Jordan River! But Jesus continued...

“So also the one with two bags of gold... gained two more.” Matthew 25:17 NIV

Also very impressive. Even though he was given much less than the other guy, he never let that bother him, he went out, invested that money, worked it, traded it, and next thing you know, he also had a return, and he doubled his masters money. Verse 18

“But... the man who had received one bag... went off, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his masters money.” Mathew 25:18 NIV

Now, when Jesus said this... his audience must have gone... “Ohh Ohh! ... This is bad!” We can see how this story is going to end... And it’s not going to be good for this guy! So... verse 19;
“After a long time…”
Matthew 25:19 NIV

Now the reason this is important, is because often, “after a long time” meant “after a lifetime.” Or “at the end of a lifetime.” You pick this up as you read the other parables in this cluster of stories. At the “end of your whole life…”

“After a long time… the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.” Matthew 25:19 NIV

In other words, he is now going to ask them for what they did with what he entrusted to them. The master says;

“What did you do… with what you had?

“The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master’ he said, ‘You entrusted me with five bags of gold, see, I have gained five more.’” Matthew 25:20 NIV

Verse 21;

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; Good job. I’m proud of you. You’ve proved yourself. You stepped up. You took the opportunity’… So…” Matthew 25:21 NIV

I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’ Matthew 25:21 NIV

He simply does what any good boss, or any decent company owner would do. He says, “Come here, let me tell you something… Well done! You were faithful with a little bit of responsibility, so now I am going to give you more responsibility.” Thats how it works! We all know that. Verse 22;

“The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.

So his master does the same thing… Verse 23;

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

“Great job! Proud of you. You used what was entrusted to you. Even though it was less than what others had received. You never had a bad attitude about it. You got stuck in there and maximised it. Great job!”

Now at this point the soundtrack to this story changes… doesn’t it?! Verse 24;

“Then the man who had received one bag of gold came.
In walks Mr one bagger... late for the party as usual. Why is he late? Probably because he couldn't find where he hid the gold! He has been so frantically trying to remember the exact spot where he buried the gold... I mean, it’s been a long time! Nate and Hannah can’t even remember where they buried something in a sandpit the previous day! So in walks Mr one bagger. After having freshly retrieved his masters hidden treasure.

‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

And this is interesting... because the first thing we notice, is that he does not begin in the same way as the others... he doesn't say; “Master, “you entrusted me with something.” He comes with a “big story.” You know the big story I’m sure! I have learnt to be wary of big long complex elaborate stories. And unlike the others... he starts... by pointing his finger at his master! Before he even talks about what he did and did not do with his masters money, he points his finger at the master and says; “I just need you to know master... this is your fault!”

His reasoning... “Master, I know that you work hard, you push hard, you expect a lot. You're not lazy. You have a high standard. I know what kind of a guy you are...

“So I was afraid...”

Master... “Just before you get all mad with me... I need you to know... I need you to understand... that this is really your fault! Because of the way you are.” Verse 25

“So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.” Matthew 25:25 NIV

Not; “Here is what was entrusted to me!” But; “Here is what belongs to you.” “I'm going to give it back to you, in the exact same measure that you gave it to me.” Not surprisingly, in Verse 26

“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant!

And its not so much that he was upset because of what he did, no. It was because of what he did not do! He is mad because this man did not do anything! He goes on;

“So you knew (You knew!) that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.” Matthew 25:26-27 NIV

And everyone in the audience is going “Yeah! I mean, come on! At least he should have done that! He is la-zeel! He never even took the money to the bank. He was too lazy to stand in the queue’s at ABSA! I mean, he dug a hole! Come on! You see... He did not see it as something entrusted to him. To do something with. He just hid it away, to protect it. He missed the whole point completely. Verse 28, His master said;

“‘So take the bag of gold from him... and give it to the one who has ten bags.”

Now this is where some of us get all spiritual, and we say, “Whooa... now hold on just a wee bit Jesus. Thats not fair!” You should take it from him, and give it to the one who has
five bags… because he has less!” Or… Split it between the guy with ten and the guy who has five. At least that’s even. “That’s more fair Jesus!” Somehow as Christians we seem to miss the point that every wise business owner gets. You give more opportunity to the people who do the best with the opportunity that you’ve given them. The guy with five got ten more. Obviously you’re going to give that guy more!

So while we are on this, let me say… In our church we are wanting to build a standard of excellence. People are important to us. But we also want to do things well. We believe in doing things well, as if we were doing it for the Lord. So when you get given an opportunity, give it all you’ve got! The same applies to your work. Give it all you’ve got! Leaders will see that, and give you greater responsibilities. That helps us to understand this next verse in context…Verse 29

*For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.*

Which doesn’t sound very Christian - does it? Its only when you understand the context that its more clear. Ready for this last part?

*And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’*

To which we all immediately go… “No! No! Are you serious! He threw him in hell?!” Okay, wait wait, what are you saying Jesus? But Jesus doesn't explain. He just ends it there. He just goes right on to the next story…something about sheep and goats! And his audience, and all of us are like, wait wait wait! You've got to explain that! What about weeping and gnashing of teeth??!

Friends, thats why I believe the context of this story is so important. When you look at all of the other stories. Jesus is talking about expectantly watching for Christ’s return. He has been talking about patiently waiting for him to return. Straight after this story of the talents, Jesus goes on to talk about sheep and goats - that’s judgement day, when he will return, and separate those who belong to him from those who do not. And yes, that does mean heaven and hell!

So when you look at the whole cluster of stories… All the parables combined, give us one clear and powerful message! You do not know when the master is coming back. You better be ready. He might come in the evening. He might come at midnight. He might come early in the morning. He might come while you are at gym. Angelic trumpets might interrupt morning tea tomorrow. You just don't know. Therefore you must be ready!!!!!

CONCLUSION

And so… as that relates to our story… here is what becomes so clear. We are stewards. We have been entrusted with certain things. We have been entrusted with the gospel. We have been entrusted with certain resources. Certain talents. And yes, You will have to give an account of what you have been entrusted with.

How have you stewarded what God has entrusted you with?
The issue is not so much what you have, or don't have. Its what you do with it.

Let me illustrate it like this. I used this illustration from an Andy Stanley message which I thought was great and have borrowed it.

(Point to shelf)

This is you… For the time being… you're a bookshelf! And each of these different things represent something about you.

Take a look at the **Clock**. You've got a certain amount of **time** in the day… you have a certain amount of **time** left.

Check out the **Laptop and the Phone**. You have a **network of friends**, people you have **connections** with. You’ve got neighbours, work colleagues, golfing partners, Facebook friends. **Connections**.

Take a look at the **Family photo’s**. You have a family… might not be crazy about them… but you're stuck with them! And they are a big part of your life.

Here are some **Certificates**. This represents the fact that you have a level of education…

Then these are **Binoculars**. They represent your vision. You have a dream…a vision… something you would like to see happen in the future… Something you long to see become reality.

Then the **Tie & Briefcase**. You’ve got a job… some career… and… if you don't have one… theres one you want! Or one you need.

Next is the **Piggybank**. We all have some measure of **money**... It might be a lot, or, it might not be a lot. It might be very very little. But you still have a measure of **money**.

Here is some **Sport equip and a instrument**. You've got a talent… We are all good at something.

Then there is this. This little **Box with the “question mark.”** This is important too. This is that thing about you, that kind of makes you you. It makes you **unique**. It may be part skill, part talent, part family background, but its that thing that makes you you.

One last thing, “**Your Story.**” You have your own story… And your story is unlike anyone else story.

And here is the amazing thing… you are an incredible unique combination of all of these things… and a lot of other complex things as well! There is no one exactly like you. No one’s bookshelf looks like yours.

And so here is where I am going with this... there is a sense in which **this stuff has been entrusted to you...** You like some of it... you don’t like other parts... there might be some things you wish you could change... Maybe you wish you had **more time**... Maybe you wish you had **more money**... Maybe you wish you came from a **better family**... Maybe you wish you could go back and finish your schooling or varsity.
Maybe you don't like all of your story. Perhaps you wish you had as much talent as somebody else. But regardless of all those wants... this is who you are.

So here is what I think Jesus is saying through this story... friends... life is short. None of us know when he will come back. And while he is away, he has entrusted us with certain things. None of us have been entrusted with the same stuff. None of us have the same bookshelf. And so here's the big idea...everything on your shelf, to some extent, has been placed there by God. The good stuff... and the tough stuff. And so its a waste of your time to complain about what you got, because what you got, is what God has given you, entrusted to you, on your shelf. And it is a unique... God given opportunity... to do something awesome with your life.

And one day... we will all have to give an account of our lives, to God. And we will say, like the guys in the story, “God, here is what you entrusted to me, here is what you put in my hands, here is what belongs to you, and while you went away, here is what I did with it.

Friends, I have to run my race. You have to run yours.

When I first heard that the leadership wanted me to take over from Pastor John in October, I started to wonder, “Yikes! How am I ever going to do some of the stuff that Pastor John does?!” You know what I have realised? Pastor John has his own race to run, and I have mine. I can’t run John’s race. I have to figure out how God wants me to run. My race. I'm can’t run anyone else’s. And neither should you.

So here is the question: “What are you going to do with what God has entrusted to you?” (x2)

Friends, it’s no use complaining about what others have, the opportunities they have, the stuff that they have. Its irrelevant. What has God entrusted to you? And what are you doing with that?

You don’t want to be that person who does nothing with it. You don't want to be that person who wastes their life away comparing themselves to others, feeling sorry for themselves and thinking they don't have much, so why even bother. “I'll just go dig a hole and bury this stuff.”

What are you going to do with what God has entrusted to you?

Sure, celebrate what God has given to others, but remember that you need to focus on what God has entrusted to you, thats what you will have to give an account for one day. He is not going to make you give an account of what was given to someone else. But he will ask you to give an account of what you did with what he put in your hands.

So as we close...Where are you in this parable? What has God entrusted to you?

Have you simply buried that? Or have you taken it and used it for God's glory?

Maybe its a measure of money?
Maybe its an actual talent?
Maybe its dream God has put on your heart?

What are you going to do with what God has entrusted to you? Let’s pray together.
“Father, thank you for this time together around your word. Thank you Jesus for teaching us about your Kingdom. Those who are faithful with little, will be entrusted with more. Please help us not to compare ourselves to what others have been given. We need to work with what you have entrusted to us. Help us to run our race faithfully and with perseverance. Help us to put the talents you have entrusted us with to work. We must not neglect them, or hide them away because of fear.”

“May we be faithful… May we be good stewards… with the time we have been given. The family we have been placed into. The experiences we have been through. The resources you have blessed us with. The connections and friendships you have brought into our lives. Our careers, our health, or special abilities and skills. All of it Lord. We want to be faithful with what you have entrusted to us. So that one day, when you come again, that we will not be found slouching around, but actively serving you with what you have given to us. In Jesus name. Amen.”
SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Read Matthew 25:14-30.

Pray over the study that God would use the passage to challenge our hearts concerning stewardship.

Who do the master and servants represent?

What things has He entrusted to you and I?

Why does the Lord add the phrase “each according to his ability” to verse 15?

If you could ask the Father for any one or two gifts, what would they be?

When you make a finance decision… What are the values that influence the choices you make?

When the master was taking account of the servant’s stewardship of his property, what do you think he was looking for?

How does the reward compare with what was entrusted (verses 21 & 22)

It is possible that the master was testing his servants as to their diligence and faithfulness during the time he was away. If that is so, what can we learn from it?

Why do you think the master became angry with the servant who hid his talent?

Whose property was it at the beginning, and whose property was it when the master returned from his journey?

What do the words of the wicked, lazy servant reveal about him?