

Trusting God With What He's Given Us

Matthew 25:14–30

Bwana Yesu Asifiwe! - Praise the Lord Jesus - Amen!

So thanks again so much for having me today. For those who don't know, my wife Katy and I work through an organisation called CMS or the Church Mission Society who send mission partners like ourselves all over the world to partner with local churches and other organisations. So in Tanzania we have been sent to partner with SAFI Tanzania.

SAFI stands for *See Ability First International*, and our heart is to help deaf and physically disabled people discover the gifts God has placed within them through training, crafts, business and discipleship.

But before I tell you more about that, I want to begin with a question that I was asked (many years ago!) when I was just 18 years old. It was at the end of a three-week mission trip to Musoma in Tanzania, and a CMS missionary sat our youth group down and asked us:

“What will you be doing with your life in ten years’ time? And what investments will you have made for God’s kingdom?”

At that age, it felt like a huge question. We were just about to choose careers, universities, relationships — the direction of our lives.

But actually, it’s an important question whatever stage of life we’re in.

Where will you be in two, five or ten years’ time? and what risks of faith will you have taken with what God has entrusted to you? Will those things be bearing fruit? Or will they have been buried away?

Today I want to speak about two things from this parable in Matthew 25:

1. The talents (bags of gold) God entrusts to each of us
2. Faith in the character of God. **BYA!**

1. The Talents God Gives Us

We know the parable of the talents so well that sometimes we forget its urgency and pertinence to our lives. A master entrusts huge sums of money to his servants and then leaves. Two servants invest what they’ve been given and it multiplies. But one servant buries it in the ground.

And Jesus’ point is clear: God does not give us gifts to hide. He gives them to be used.

The “bags of gold or” or talents” in the story were each worth about half a million pounds in today’s money, so he was talking about serious sums. And throughout the Gospels, Jesus speaks about money again and again because, our relationship to it often reveals where our trust really lies.

But the analogy of the talents obviously extends far wider than just our finances, it encompasses:

SLIDE

our skills, our influence, our opportunities, our time, our spiritual gifts....

AND perhaps the greatest treasure with which we as Christians have been entrusted but which is often overlooked is of course the Gospel - this treasure we hold in jars of clay, in our ordinary, fragile selves. This simple truth that the Angels long to look into - **the good news of Jesus Christ. BYA!**

So I guess the question is:

Are we trying to multiply what God has given us for his glory? Or are we hiding it away and if so what are our reasons? *Now I don't know how many of you are into rugby?* But There's a well known phrase shouted by rugby referees at the back of a maul when it has stopped moving forward:

“Use it or lose it!” **SLIDE**

This meaning use the ball before it's given to the opposition. And through this parable, Jesus seems to be showing us that this is a Kingdom principle - we should use what he has given us in faith or be in danger of losing it. There's an urgency there isn't there?

This is one of the reasons your church's support means so much to us. As a church, you've chosen to invest into God's kingdom in so many ways, but not least through supporting us in Tanzania over the last 15 years. And before that, the Harts who set up Neema Crafts back in 2003, I can't imagine how many people have been blessed through that ministry over those 23 years! **BYA**

The help of YOUR church supports our work through CMS, whose vision is:

“With Jesus, with others, to the edges.” **SLIDE**

What does that mean — *the edges*?

Well when I was a boy trying to earn some pocket money I used to clean windows and when my work was being inspected (usually by my dad!) it was often the edges and corners that I maybe hadn't got to quite well enough that I'd overlooked. And that is what it means to be working at the edges, in the places and with the people who are forgotten or overlooked. And in Tanzania, many deaf and disabled people live right at those edges.

If you happen to have a disability in Tanzania you have a 7% chance of finding a job. Only one in **five deaf** students complete their education up to GCSE level and if you're deaf, you're more likely than not to be illiterate.

Many people living with disabilities in Tanzania don't have access to even the most basic assistive equipment and apologies if you've seen this little clip before, but it's so

illustrative of the difference even a small thing like a zimmer frame can make to someone's life..... **[Slides of children helped]**

Any surplus income the SAFI social enterprise makes goes straight into directly supporting local people with disabilities with the most useful assistive equipment - it's my favourite part of the work.

So SAFI Tanzania has three bottom lines if you like:

Disciplining and creating job opportunities through training and enterprise

Sustaining the project financially through sales revenue

And Direct support for local people with disabilities

BYA So since I was last here, there were only four of us working at SAFI, we'd just decided to base ourselves in two dilapidated buildings owned by a man called Bwana Mambo or 'Mr Issues'! I've now got a video to show you which gives you a tour of the centre as it is now

[VIDEO HERE — 3–5 mins]

So, we have around 35 staff and trainees involved through our training centre, crafts workshop, café and shop. And one of the greatest joys has been watching hidden talents emerge. It feels a bit like digging up treasure.

People like Gloria **[Gloria SLIDE]** who we met on the tour. She was stuck at her home all day with no income having to depend on her wider family for tiny amounts to look after her and her young daughter. And now she's learnt to be our head barista, she's earning a good wage and welcoming guests from all over the world and teaching them sign language!

Or Elinadya **[SLIDE]**, who you may remember seeing last time I was here, who ever since losing his leg in a motorbike accident hadn't been able to support his wife and four children and was losing hope, stuck at home day in day out with very little confidence. We've discovered he's super capable on the wood lathe and can figure out how to make make pretty much anything we give him...

I'd love to tell you about all of the individuals you've seen in the video, (hand picked?), but it's been amazing to see what a difference opportunity and a nurturing environment has made to peoples lives and what a privilege it is to share time in prayer, worship and God's word together each day. **BYA**

2. Faith in the Character of God

So now, back in the parable, I'd like us to notice something deeper. The third servant didn't bury the talent because he hated the master. Nor because what was entrusted to him was not as much as the others. He buried it because he was afraid.

Afraid of getting it wrong afraid of losing what he'd been given, but ultimately, afraid because he misunderstood the character of his master He says: "I knew you were a hard man..."

The tragedy is this servant built his whole life around assumptions about his master that weren't true. Corrie ten Boom the well known Christian writer and concentration camp survivor famously said:

“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.” SLIDE

The servant with one talent's problem was not lack of ability. It was lack of trust. And I think many Christians live like that servant, because they haven't spent enough time getting to know God's character for themselves.

We bury gifts and stay safe, because deep down we are unsure whether God can truly be trusted. And this attitude goes all the way back to the garden doesn't it? Where Satan effectively questions God's trustworthiness.

But the Gospel, if we truly believe it, removes every excuse for doubting God's character.

As we all know, John 3:16

says — For God so.... **loved** the world that He gave His one and only Son

If God loved us enough to give us Jesus — the greatest act of sacrificial, undeserved love imaginable, **even** whilst we were still his enemies — then surely we can trust him with our lives, can't we? John, the disciple who we are told was closest to Jesus, also describes God as love itself. If this is true then why do we doubt? **BYA**

Ten years after being asked that question on the shores of Lake Victoria, Katy and I stepped away from our safer and a predictable lives in Bath and moved to Tanzania.

And now It's 15 years ago this month since Katy and I first went to Tanzania and if we had one word to describe our experience of God's love, provision and care during that time, it would be **faithful**. We've made lots of mistakes and we've have plenty of fear and doubt, but our testimony is that God has always been **faithful**. **BYA!**

So I wonder today: Is God calling you to get to **know** him more deeply as you **trust him** with more? Knowing and trusting are often different sides of the same coin aren't they?

Is there something you've buried because you're just not sure if God will come through for you. A gift? A calling? A conversation about Jesus? Or even a step of obedience? Maybe it feels like something so small. But in this parable, the issue was never how much the servants had. The issue was whether they trusted the master enough to use it. **BYA**

And perhaps for some of us today, that includes our finances too.

Giving is not just practical. It is worship. It is faith in action. It is declaring that our security rests in God, not our self-sufficiency. As Katy and I continue investing our lives among those at the edges through SAFI Tanzania, we'd love to invite you to partner with us as a *number of you already do*.

CARD If you feel prompted to support our work personally, the most helpful way is through regular giving via CMS. You can take a photo of the screen now to get the details SLIDE. Even if it's just £5/month a regular amount makes it so much easier for CMS to predict our income and budget. (Buy me a coffee once a month!)

But more than anything, we would value your prayers. We've seen time and again how faithful to answer the Lord is when we pray and the spiritual battle always seems so real to us in our work. SO please do take note of the QR code or Whatsapp number up on the screen now if you'd like to know what to pray for us.

Let's Pray

Lord God, thank you that you reached out into each one of us in your love, through Jesus/ Thank you that whenever we see the cross, we can know that your love for us stretches wider and higher and deeper than we can imagine. Help us, by your Spirit, to trust you with more of our lives, trust your character enough to be creative with what you have given us and see you multiply it for your Kingdom. Katika jina la Yesu, Amen!