

# The Sin of Doing Nothing

In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew there is an account which Jesus told that is commonly called the Parable of the Talents. Christian people sometimes refer to this portion of Scripture when they speak of those with outstanding abilities. When we carefully study this chapter, it is a bit difficult to agree with Abraham Lincoln when he said “that all men are created equal.” When it comes to the immortality of the soul and having equal rights to liberty and justice as a citizen of one’s country, we believe that all men are created equal. But when it comes to God-given talents and abilities, we do not believe that all men are created equal.

In the Parable of the Talents we learn of a man who had money and owned some servants. This man was planning to take a trip. Before he made his journey he called his servants together and divided among them his money. He gave one man five talents, another, two talents, and a third, one talent. He instructed them that they were to take this money and invest it and use it. Then the man made his journey, stayed the appointed time, and returned. When he got home, he called his servants together for an accounting of that which they had done with the money he had left in their charge. The first man came and said, “Lord, I took the five talents and put them to work. They earned five others and here are the ten.” His Lord said, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” The second man came and said, “Lord, I took two talents and put them to work and they have earned two others and here are the four.” This man received the identical commendation, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” Then came the man who had received the one talent, and Jesus told His story like this: “Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:24-30).

Now it is this man’s experience that we want to consider, hoping that each one of us might be encouraged to be a better steward of that which God has committed to our trust. This man was like most of us, a one-talented man. He was just an ordinary fellow. In the world there are a few five-talented and a few two-talented people. There are not many men like Thomas Edison who invented over a thousand different things in his life. There are very few men like Leonardo da Vinci, the great artist and inventor. From the Parable of the Talents we want to pay special attention to three things about the one-talented man: The Wickedness of doing nothing, the Costliness of doing nothing, and the Foolishness of doing nothing.

## **1. The Wickedness of Doing Nothing**

His lord said to him, "Thou wicked and slothful servant." The word "wicked" is one of the strongest words of denunciation in the New Testament. In fact it is so strong that it is used only sixteen times in the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Jesus used the word eight times, Paul used the word four times, John used the word three times, and the Roman ruler, Gallio, used the word one time. The reason this word is used so sparingly, is because it is such a potent word of denouncement. We use the word sparingly in our own English language. We speak of people as being mistaken, foolish, sinful, or dishonest, but not many people do we describe as being wicked.

Now what was there about this man that prompted the Lord to call him a wicked man? You will observe that the man was not a thief; he had not stolen the talent that was in his possession; it had been given to him. He came by it honestly. Stealing was not his wickedness. Neither was this man a prodigal. He had in his possession a sizeable sum of money. Like the young man in the 15th chapter of Luke he could have made his journey to a far country and there wasted his substance with riotous living. He had enough wealth to finance a pretty good fling, but this he did not do. Vulgar, riotous living was not his wickedness. Moreover, this man was not a liar. He could have made up an alibi. He could have said, "I worked and earned two other talents, but last week just before you returned, a thief broke into my house and carried away the two talents that I have earned. Now, all that is left is the one original talent." It would have been an easy thing for this man to have fabricated a rather convincing alibi, but this he did not do. He told the truth; lying was not his wickedness. What, then, was the wickedness of the one-talented man? The answer lies right on the surface of the account. He buried his talent in the earth, left it there, and refused to use it.

The man is labeled as a wicked man simply because he did nothing. This seems to us a peculiar kind of wickedness. In fact, in our society, we sometimes regard idleness as a virtue, but this parable very plainly teaches that in the eyes of Jesus idleness is wickedness. You will remember that this same Jesus told the story about a man traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho. The man was attacked by thieves. They beat him, stripped him of his clothing, and left him beside the road half dead. Jesus told that incident, not to denounce the criminal class, the thieves and the robbers, they are already condemned. He told the story to point out the sinfulness of a Priest and a Levite. They came by that way, saw a man in need, passed on the other side of the road, and did nothing. In the eyes of Jesus it is wicked to do nothing. It is wicked not to care. It is wicked not to work. It is wicked not to pray. It is wicked not to give. It is wicked not to witness. Remember the Scripture, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). The first thing we see in the account of this one-talented man is the wickedness of idleness.

## **2. The Costliness of Doing Nothing**

His lord said, "Take, therefore, the talent from him and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto everyone that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance. But from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." Now the words of this Scripture sound very strange

to us in our day when there is a rapid tendency toward the welfare state. Liberal politicians are saying today, "Take from him that has and give to him that has not." But Jesus says, "Take from him that has not and give to him that has."

Some regard this as one of the most difficult verses in the Bible, but actually its meaning is quite obvious. It is one of the basic laws of life. Either you use what you have or lose what you have. This law applies to every area of living. You can take your right arm, strap it to your side and refuse to use it for an extended period of time; then when you release the arm you will find that its usage has been impaired. If the muscles of our physical body are allowed to lie dormant, they will wither and become useless.

The same principle applies in the area of human relationships. If a man has a friendship that he wants to destroy, he does not have to attack his friend. All he needs to do is ignore him—never write, or call, or visit. Just ignore the friendship, leave it alone, and eventually it will die. If a man wants to destroy the happiness and tranquillity of his home, he need not abuse his wife physically. All that he has to do is to leave her alone. Never show any signs of affection, never express any appreciation for good meals and clean clothes. Just do nothing, and by so doing the man will destroy his home. If a man wants to destroy the character of his children, he does not have to set up an aggressive program. It is not necessary for him to buy obscene and pornographic literature, bring it home, and scatter it about the house in order to poison his children's minds and destroy their character. All that he has to do is leave them alone. Do not bother finding out who their friends are; do not know where they go at night, or when they come in. Do not know or care what they do. Just ignore them. Leave them alone, and thereby a man can destroy the character of his children and household. If a farmer wants to destroy his crop, it is not necessary for him to plow it up or plant weeds in his field. All that he needs to do is sit back in his rocking chair and pass the hours away. Just do nothing, day after day; ignore seed time and harvest, and thereby a man will lose and destroy his crop. The point is that it costs a man to do nothing in any area of life.

This same principle certainly applies in the realm of the spiritual. If you want to hurt your church and do detriment to the cause of Christ, let me suggest a program, the result of which is guaranteed. Here it is: Get so busy with the things of the world that you have no time for the things of God. When you attend church, do so only occasionally. Never go on Sunday night, and on Sunday morning. Just go on special occasions. Then when you do attend, be certain that all you do is occupy a pew. Don't put forth any personal effort. Don't pray. Don't accept a place of responsibility. Don't witness. Don't give. Don't care. Just do nothing, and you can hurt your church more in this way than in any other way.

Jesus said, "Take therefore, the talent from him." It is a very costly thing for a man to do nothing.

### 3. The Foolishness of Doing Nothing

We arrive at the final lesson in this fashion: I want you to pretend that you are hearing the Parable of the Talents for the first time. You have never heard it before in all your life. Now back up and notice the basis of this one-talented man's explanation to his lord. He said, "Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed: and I was afraid." Now stop there and remember that you have never heard this story before. All that you have heard from this man is the basis of his explanation. Now, taking these introductory words as an indication, what do you suppose would logically have been his explanation to his lord? It seems to me that he would have said, "And so I knuckled down and I went to work. These other fellows doubled what you gave to them, but not I. I tripled what you gave to me." Now, logically, it seems to me that this is what he should have said; but instead he said, "Lord, I knew, and I did nothing." How foolish! But how much better will our explanations sound some day when we stand in judgment before God?

Like this one-talented man we too can say, "Lord, I knew. I knew that my friends were lost without Christ. I knew this, Lord, and so I just did nothing. I knew my church needed my support, my talents, my encouragement. I knew this, Lord, and so I just did nothing. I knew that Jesus had died upon the cross for the remission of the sins of the whole world. I also knew that he had commissioned us to take the story of His redeeming love to every man in all the world. I knew this, Lord, and I just buried my talent in the earth and did nothing." How foolish our explanations and excuses are going to sound when one day we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, or could it be the Great White Throne Judgment, if we persist in doing nothing.

Frequently the tendency with one-talented people is to say, "I cannot do much and so I just will do nothing." We think that if we could speak with the eloquence of the apostle Paul, then we would witness for Christ as Paul witnessed for Christ. But if God has not given us that ability then He has not given us that responsibility. The thing He does expect of us is that in our own stuttering, stammering way, as best we can, we speak to our friends and our neighbors about their relationship to Him. We think if we could give thousands and thousands of dollars, then we would be willing to financially support the cause of Christ through missions. But if God has not given us that ability, neither has He given us that responsibility. The thing He does expect us to do when He prospers us in a material way, is to give as He has prospered us. What God may lay on our heart to do may seem small in comparison to what others may be doing, but the truth is that the Kingdom of God has always moved along on the strength of the dedicated efforts of one-talented men and women.

One of the interesting stories coming out of World War II is about the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. It was during the days of the German blitz. Bombers from across the channel were pounding the Island of England night and day. The wheels of the British war factories were turning twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The industry of England was not accustomed to this intense pace and they found themselves running short of fuel. So Winston Churchill gathered

the coal miners of England and assembled them in one of the great halls in London. Then he stood before them and put forth an appeal with an imaginary victory parade, which he said would one day take place in the streets of London. He said that in the parade there would come marching a blind man led by a buddy and someone from the crowd would ask, "Soldier, where were you during the bleakest, darkest hour of England's history?" This soldier could answer back with pride, "I was at Dunkirk where hundreds died for liberty." Also, in the parade there would come marching a soldier with no arms, and someone would ask, "Mister, where were you during the bleakest, blackest hour of England's history?" This soldier could answer back with pride, "I was on the front lines in France giving my best for my country." Then he said that at the back of the parade there would come marching a man with a light on his hat, black smudges on his face, and a pick in his hand, and someone half jeeringly from the crowd would ask, "Mister, where were you during the bleakest, blackest hour of England's history?" And Winston Churchill said, "That man can answer back with pride, 'I was in the pit with my face to the wall.'" Then he sent the coal miners home, and England had her needed fuel. If an earthly monarch can rally his citizens to produce like that, how much more eagerly should we respond to the call of God?

Now, friend, the probability is that our name will never be written in lights in the Kingdom of God. Perhaps we will never receive even small recognition for the contribution we have made for the cause of Christ. But this we can be sure of: If we take the one talent that is ours, and in our own place, in our own way, use it as best we can in the service of our Lord, one day we will hear Jesus say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

God has designed a great plan of salvation. He has given His Son to die for our sins, at a terrible cost of agony and suffering on the cross of Calvary. Jesus did not **have** to come all the way from Heaven to shed His blood to redeem us. He did this freely and willingly. If He had done nothing about our salvation, we would all be doomed forever. Yet we will be lost if we do not accept this plan. If we simply **do nothing**, we are lost for eternity. It would be very **wicked** indeed, the most **costly** mistake we could ever make, and it would likewise be a **foolish** thing just to do nothing about our never dying soul. How can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

If you are still out in the darkness of sin, come to the Savior today.

-Harry B. Nell

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#### BIBLE HELPS

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