

# The Gift of Giving

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## THE CHANCE OF A LIFETIME

Do you think about the time you will have to stand before God and be accountable for the way you lived? As human beings we have a tendency to think we can squirm our way out of anything. We tend to think that we can worm our way out of the consequences of our actions. Ever had a ticket for anything and thought – yes – that’s fair cop – I was in the wrong? Mostly our natural response is to fight it – after all if we were in the wrong then it certainly wasn’t our fault – was it?

We learn this very young don’t we? On the school trip I just went on there was a classic example. The children were allowed a disposable camera rather than a digital one – in case they got lost! One evening one of the boys came to me quite upset because his room mate had taken about 10 pictures on his camera. Bear in mind – if you can remember about cameras before the digital age – that this kind of camera has only 24 pictures on. Once taken – that’s it – you can’t delete them and start again. He has 24 pictures for the week and by Tuesday someone else has taken 10! So I go and question his room mate to ask what has been going on. What do you suppose was his reply?

It stunned me: “Oh yes Mr Phillips – I did take Jack’s camera and I took 10 pictures, I think. You see I didn’t think it fair that he had a camera and I didn’t, so I decided that the best thing would be for me to take about 10 pictures so that I had some memories of the week. But now, since you’ve challenged me on this, I realise that I was, in truth, mistaken and that it was wrong for me to take pictures on someone else’s camera. I think the best thing for us to do is for me to receive a punishment – probably in the form of sitting out one of tomorrow’s activities – that would be justice.”

No way!! – He's 9 years old – he said: “ But Jack said I could!” It's not my fault – don't blame me! And since it's not my fault – maybe you should change your mind and let me off!

Do you ever think about the time you will have to stand before God and be accountable for the way you lived? There is one before whom we will have to stand – all of us. He is Holy and gracious and just – but he wants us to know and understand that we will have to give an account of our lives. We will not be able to squirm our way out of it or change his mind!

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’ The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’ 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!’ Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘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. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So 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. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.

For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Mathew 24 v 14-30

Friends, in preparing yourself for the time when you will stand before the throne of God and give account of your life, you would do well to grasp the truths that are contained within this parable.

The first truth is that the master is the Lord of the Gift. He is an unbelievably generous person. In those days – when this story is set – there were no big corporations as we know them today. Wealth was concentrated in a few very rich households, the master is from one of them. The master gets three servants together and does an extraordinary thing. He gives them each a huge sum of money. At that time a talent was worth about fifteen years’ wages. Fifteen Years!!! People in this time generally lived a day to day existence, so the sums of money involved here are, quite simply, staggering. If your boss came to you and said: “OK – here’s 15 years worth of your pay for you to invest!” – what would you think? The master then leaves, and leaves them with the money.

What slowly dawns on the servants is this: they have just been given the chance of a lifetime. What do you do when you are presented with the opportunity of a lifetime? Do you ever watch Deal or no Deal? People can win money by choosing from 21 boxes. Eventually they narrow it down to one box in which lies a sum of money. The sums of money range from 1p to £ ¼ million. After every 3 boxes the banker will offer them money (depending on the amounts they have left) to quit the game. The contestants view this as their chance of a lifetime, and they all have their theories as to which box is the one with the £ ¼ million in it!

What do you do when presented with the chance of a lifetime? Jesus says the Lord of the Gift has given the chance of a lifetime. Perhaps one of the most important things we should notice in this story is there are no “no-talent” people. The master gave to all. The master gives to each one differently, but nobody gets nothing! This is a deep truth – there are no – “no-talent” people listening to this talk.

Truth is, the master generously gives to everybody: he has been very generous with you! And – he has entrusted his property to you. You ever stopped to think like that? If everything you have is a gracious and loving gift from a lavishly generous God, then he has in truth entrusted his property to you! He has given you money, possessions, abilities, talents and his offer is still on the table – still open. You can, if you choose to, invest what he has given you in his kingdom. You notice that the first servant went off “at once” – he got it – this is the chance of a lifetime: “I would be foolish to miss it!”

Others have come before you who went off “at once” – and others will come after you! But this is your day – this is your time. You’ve got one shot – one lifetime – and the Lord of the Gift wonders of you...what are you going to do?

The Lord of the Gift is also the Lord of the Settled Account. The master goes away – but he makes it clear he is coming back. “After a long time, the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.” (v19) And make no mistake this is a serious business. The first two servants receive their reward – the same reward even though they had different results because each gave his best! The third servant however attempts to evade responsibility. Having hidden his talent he says: “There is what belongs to you!” His response is rooted in a misunderstanding of who God is. Perhaps he was miffed at not being given as much as the other two servants. Perhaps he realised he wouldn’t be able to make as much profit, so he played it safe!

Friends, this is a tragedy – but I wonder how many of us do exactly the same. Friends, how many of us play the game of looking around at others and thinking – I’d like to like them; I’d like to be able to do what they do! Friends, this is a very dangerous game to play – the game of comparing ourselves to others. It is a dangerous game to compare our money, our possessions, our gifts, our talents, our abilities with others. The truth is friends that it is a game that I am continually prone to play. I am skilled at doing it in all sorts of ways:

Comparing myself to other leaders

## Comparing myself to other preachers

If I do this, there are some very important truths I miss: the Lord of the Gift gives to us all differently. He gives to suit our personality, interest, passion and our differing circumstances.

If you read the story carefully you will notice that the Lord of the Settled Account asks none of the servants to account for the talents he gave to someone else! Friends, God will not ask you to account for the talents he has not given you! We must ruthlessly refuse to compare our money, possessions, gifts, talents or abilities with others! The danger is that if we do we often end up burying our talents – and doing nothing with them. The challenge of the 3<sup>rd</sup> servant is that he isn't judged for doing wrong – he's judged for doing nothing!

The master does not apologise for what he gave him – that was and remains a generous gift. What he says in effect is: "It matters to me what you do with what I've given you." The tragedy here is the sin of unrealised potential: the wilful refusal to invest the good gifts of God for the glory of the giver. The wilful refusal to choose risk and obedience and to choose comfort and safety instead. The point is clear: what you choose to do with your life and all your resources matters! It matters to God and it matters to the world, the people around you. And isn't this the God who can take what we have and transform it : 5 loaves 2 fish; water into wine.....!! The extraordinary in the ordinary.

We might look at this and think this judgement harsh – but in truth it's motivated by love. God simply does not want you, at the end of your life to look back and know the profound regret of having done nothing...and missing the chance of a lifetime.

The Lord of the Gift and the Lord of the Settled Account is also the Lord of the Lavish Reward. Don't you long to hear these words: "Well done good and faithful servant!" The thought that one day God will applaud you. The joy of the Lord is the place of the ultimate fulfilment of human potential. Friends it is our eternal destiny and faithful servants will be put in charge of many things! What we have been given now is nothing compared to what he gives then!

“Dear friends, now we are children of God and what we will be has not been made known. But we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” (1 John 3 v2)

Friends, we have been given the chance of a lifetime with all that God has so generously lavished upon us – and he is wondering...what are you going to do?

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