

**"WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM LIFE?"**

**DATE: January 13, 1957**

**PARK AVENUE METHODIST CHURCH**

**TEXT: PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.**

When Ulysses S. Grant was a small boy of eight years of age, he wanted very much to buy a pony that a neighbor had for sale. The neighbor was asking twenty-five dollars for the pony. The boy's father thought that this was too much. He advised his son to go to the neighbor and offer twenty dollars, and if this was turned down, then to offer twenty two dollars and fifty cents. If this was not accepted, then to give him the full twenty five dollars, the price that he asked. Ulysses S. Grant, in his autobiography, refers to this business transaction in the following words:

"I at once mounted a horse and went for the pony. When I got to the neighbor's house, I said: 'Papa says I may offer you \$20.00 for the pony, but if you won't take that, I am to offer you \$22.50, and if you won't take that, to give you \$25.00.'"

I'm sure that we're tempted to think that young Grant was a little feebish in this business matter. However, he showed some good common sense. He wanted something very badly. It had a price, and he was willing to pay that price in order to have it. There's a lesson in this for us. There are many things in life that we want - health, happiness, friendships, recognition, peace of mind - just to name a few. All these things have a price. The trouble is that we aren't willing to pay the full price in order to have these things. We want them at bargain prices.

All of this leads us to the question: WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM LIFE? Jesus lays down certain conditions in the Parable of the Talents which was read for our scripture, and which help us to find answers to this question. In this parable, Jesus is pointing out that each of us has been given a certain amount of native ability to start with. AND WHAT WE GET FOR IT, DEPENDS ON HOW WE USE IT!

This parable is well known. A talent would be worth about a thousand dollars. One man was given five talents, and he went out immediately and worked hard, and put his money to good use. In fact, he doubled the five talents which his master had given him. The second man was given two talents. He worked hard and doubled his amount. Both of these men received the same word of gratitude from the master for work well done and for their faithfulness. But the third man in the parable was given only one talent and he went out and hid it. He came back with it unused. This irritated the master. It made him angry, and he took the talent away from him and gave it to another man.

"For to every one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

What ideas was Jesus trying to convey to his followers in telling this parable? There are three ideas which grow out of this parable which help us to answer this question: WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM LIFE.

I would like to share them with you this morning.

**FIRST: WE CAN EXPECT TO GET OUT OF LIFE WHAT WE PUT INTO IT.**

All men are of equal worth in the sight of God, but not all men are equal in ability, mind and personality. The parable POINTS OUT that people have different amounts of native equipment. It also POINTS OUT that men are rewarded according to the use they make of the capacities they have.

MOST OF US don't get more out of life because we don't put more into it. MOST OF US have more talent than we use. Only when we invest to a maximum of our capacity do we realize a maximum of return. IT'S NOT HOW MUCH TALENT WE HAVE BUT WHAT WE DO WITH WHAT WE HAVE THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE. This is demonstrated for us in the Dictionary of American Biography. A study of one thousand outstanding men and women listed showed that only forty-eight were regarded as precocious in their youth. In other words, most success comes from hard, intelligent work. We can look for success and happiness only as we live creative and useful lives.

Take the case, for instance, of a young man who immigrated to this country from Hungary when he was twenty-two. He took a job working in a pencil factory making only seven dollars a week. He liked music and later switched to a job playing the piano in a 2nd Avenue cafe. Here he made fifteen dollars plus all the goulash he could eat. It was a good safe job, but this immigrant youth wanted a little more than all the goulash he could eat. During the years that followed, SIGMUND ROMBERG gave all he could to developing his musical talent. He wrote scores of operettas and songs. And when he died, he was one of the world's most beloved composers.

We get out of life what we put into it. This is as true today as it was in the time of Jesus. Recently I saw the play, THE HAPPY MILLIONAIRE. There's one line in the play which I'd like to refer to. In the scene in which the line appears, the father is conveying to his teen age daughter some of his philosophy of life. This has been prompted by his own disapproval of his daughter's new wealthy boy friend who apparently has some talent, but has no determination, spirit, or desire to make anything of his talent. The father in pointing out this fact says:

"There are twenty-four hours in a day. And if you fill them with nothing you end up with nothing. You end up being poor...really poor, where it counts....."

Life constantly is challenging us to give our best, for we do only get out of life what we put into it. This is true in every field of activity. It is especially true in religion. Our own faith grows, and matures, and takes on new meaning for us as we give ourselves unselfishly to the work and worship of the church. All of us are debtors to the five talent men in science, government and entertainment. The church is in great need of more five talent men...men who are willing to jump in and carry responsibility. Such men lift the level of life for all of us.

Henry Thoreau said one hundred years ago in referring to his Walden Pond experience, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately.....to live deeply...to suck in the marrow out of the bone of life." It is in this same spirit that we should approach each day, for is it not true that WE DO GET OUT OF LIFE, ONLY WHAT WE PUT INTO IT!

**SECOND: IN THE SECOND PLACE, THE PARABLE IS POINTING OUT THAT WE CAN EXPECT TO LOOSE THE TALENT AND POWERS WE DO NOT USE.**

The man who had been given one talent hid it in the ground for safe-keeping. This was a common way of hiding money in those days. He did this for a reason. Perhaps he was afraid. Fear kept him from venturing forth. He perhaps thought he was doing the right thin in bringing the one talent back to his master, intact and unused. But the master was angry with him. The man had not produced. He had not used his talent. He had been too careful. He had taken no risks. He had displayed no faith. And so the master took the talent away from him and gave it to another.

This is another law of life in operation. Physically, mentally, morally and spiritually, we loose the powers we do not use. All we have to do to have our talents taken away is to do nothing. The man with the one talent was not a bad person. He wasn't like the prodigal son that went off and spent all his money foolishly. **HE FAILED BECAUSE HE TOOK A STINGY AND MISERLY ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE.** He was so anxious to keep what he had that he lost it. This is true no matter how many talents we have.

I'm reminded of a 73 year old man who died recently of malnutrition in Union City, N. J.. He was a retired government employee and lived in a very cheap hotel room. His name was Joseph Bowling. After he died, the police searched his hotel room and found a small box containing nearly half a million dollars in cash and securities. Joseph Bowling had always given the impression of being very poor. He literally starved himself to death in the midst of plenty. He was a miser with what he had, and his stinginess cost him his life.

We may be doing the same thing. We starve ourselves in the midst of plenty. To be sure, we find it hard to hoard money, but we are guilty of hoarding the talent we possess. We **COMPLAIN** because we don't have more. We **BLAME** our parents, our fate, our boss, our world for our own limitations. We are **AFRAID** to meet life halfway and give it the very best we have. Disappointed because we can't do the big things, we do nothing. We live bottled up lives and wind up being unhappy and desolate.

We need to be reminded that our fate and future is determined not by what life brings to us, but by what we bring to life. Someone has put it this way:

"Take a piece of wax, a piece of meat, some sand, some clay, and some shavings and put them on a fire. Each is acted upon by the same agent. Yet the wax melts, the meat fries, the sand dries, the clay hardens, and the shaving blaze. Just so, under identical influence of circumstance and environment, one man becomes stronger, another weaker, and another withers away."

In other words, it's not the hardships or handicaps of life that make us fail. It's the surrender of our own inner spirit and determination. When we start to complain that the odds are against us.....that the world owes us a living.....that the other man has gooten all the lucky breaks....then we're having danger. When we pamper ourselves and don't use our self-reliance, our initiative, our ordinary abilities, something fine and great goes out of our character and our society.

Charlotte Bronte expresses her scorn for the narrow and miserly life in these words:

"Better to try all things and find all empty, than to try nothing and leave your life a blank."

And Arnold Toynbee puts it in broader terms:

"My study of 21 civilizations has convinced me that cultures are healthy only when they are creative. The civilization that solves its problems and rests on its oars has a sad future if it does not respond to the next challenge with a different answer...."

We know that money hoarded corrupts men. We know that friendship withheld can turn to hate. We know that when we do not vote, we are in danger of losing the right to vote. If we do not use the opportunity to worship, we can soon lose the desire to worship. If we fail to sow the Christian seed of love and service, we shall lose it ourselves.

Most of us are ordinary, one talent people. But we should nevertheless make the most of our singular talent. **FOR WE ARE NOT JUDGED BY HOW MUCH WE HAVE....BUT BY WHAT WE DO WITH WHAT WE HAVE!**

**THIRD: IN THE THIRD PLACE, WE CAN EXPECT THE FREEDOM TO USE OUR TALENTS AND OUR OPPORTUNITIES AS WE SO DESIRE.**

The three men that Jesus spoke of in this parable did as they wanted with what had been given them. No one told them what to do. The five talent man could have buried his talent. The one talent man could have invested his talent. The master went away and left them. All three men made their own choice.

Life is like that. We're on our own. We can choose to live selfishly or unselfishly. It's up to us. In this country, we're free to sleep in Sunday mornings, or come to church. We have talents which God has given us. We're free to use them as we will. But we are held responsible by God for what we have.

We may have more talent than we think we have. The world too has more opportunities than we suspect. Occasionally we hear it said that all the opportunities are gone.....that everything has been done. This is just the complaint of small minds and fearful hearts. Life is a rich and fertile field for men of vision, faith and courage. The trouble may be that we're lacking in determination and in the willingness to work and sacrifice. The courageous person makes opportunities.

Back in 1934 the depression was still in force. There were few opportunities for young people. Opportunities for new businesses were practically non-existent. This was especially true in the recording field. Radio had forced all but two of the companies to close down. And the two large companies were thought to have a monopoly on the field. A young man by the name of Jack Kapp thought he saw an opening. He had no inside track. His father was simply a door to door salesman. And Jack Kapp had worked very hard just to get through highschool. But he had ideas and energy. He studied the limitations of the big companies. With little financial backing, he started the DECCA RECORD CO., specializing in popular music. It had great success. The opportunity was there for anyone to take. Jack Kapp took it. Such stories could be repeated a thousand times in a thousand different ways.

**WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM LIFE?** We cannot expect handouts, or lucky breaks, or ease and wealth. We can expect hardship, discouragement, resistance, and indifference. But we can also expect the freedom to prove ourselves before God and man. The opportunities for self-development, for service, for abundant living were never greater than they

are right now.

Yes, the men referred to in the parable were on their own. We would do well to catch the spirit of the man with the five talents. It is the spirit of adventure. It is the spirit that risks security for progress. It is the spirit that opens new frontiers and blazes trails to a new and better world.

Emerson caught that spirit in the essay, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR:

"We will walk on our own feet.  
We will work with our own hands.  
We will speak our own minds."

We need that spirit. God can use every talent we have.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM LIFE?

FIRST: WE CAN ONLY EXPECT TO GET OUT OF LIFE WHAT WE PUT INTO IT.  
SECOND: WE CAN EXPECT TO LOOSE THE TALENT WE DO NOT USE.  
THIRD: AND WE CAN EXPECT THE FREEDOM TO USE OUR TALENTS AND  
OUR OPPORTUNITIES AS WE WILL.

LET US PRAY:

Our Father, we do realize that we are not using all of our talents and gifts which have been given to us. Help us to throw off our indifference, our laziness, and our selfishness, that we may catch the spirit of Him who lived life to its fullest measure. Amen.