

Spiritual Economics!

Zephaniah 1^{7,12-18}; Psalm 90¹⁻⁸; 1 Thessalonians 5¹⁻¹¹; Matthew 25¹⁴⁻³⁰

God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation. (1 Thessalonians 5⁹)

If you take Zephaniah literally - **neither the silver nor the gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath** - you cannot use the Gospel in support of making money or even Calvin's Protestant Work Ethic, where prosperity is seen as a sign of God's blessing.

You can't defend that unless you live in comfort - because the other side of that coin has to be the belief that those who do not have material comfort or financial wealth are outside of God's blessing and that is at odds with the rest of the Bible!

You can't have Paul stating confidently in 1 Thessalonians **God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation** and then believe that God willingly inflicts the fate of the **worthless servant - throw him into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth** - but that introduces us to the tension that not everyone chooses for themselves the things God offers.

So what does the Parable of Talents mean? How do you understand the verse:

All those who have, more will be given and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken?

In brief, it is this: we either use the resources God has given us for a positive effect or that to do nothing is to refuse God and his generous grace.

Once we become Christians there is no possibility of us being passive but we have to develop the resources God has given us. Doing nothing, to fail to do good, isn't just a neglect of the potential God has given, but a rejection of the God who gave it.

So what is the 'talent' that God has given you and how do you develop it?

- ✦ Live life as a Christian. Paul's idea is that we should live as if Christ should return as unexpectedly as a thief, or as the delivery comes at the end of a pregnancy. As a Christian everything we do should be consistently what God would expect - we don't need the cover of darkness to mask who we are or what we do: if we are ashamed of anything - so that we don't want God or others to see it - we should stop it! We are people of **faith, hope and love**.
- ✦ Pray - if you can't do anything else you can pray. Churches thrive when its faithful people pray. We have a Prayer Diary - do you use it? What an encouragement it is to me to know that I am prayed for on the 26th day of each month (let me know if you need one and I will let you have it). You don't have to be eloquent to pray, just faithful.
- ✦ Encourage - Paul ends what he says to the Thessalonians with the words **therefore encourage one another and build up each other as indeed you are doing**. St Mary's is a very positive place to be - people here do, so far as I can see and know and have experienced - encourage one another. Keep it up!
- ✦ Share faith - the Christian faith is one of the best-kept secrets and the Christian community one of the least-known supports. Psychology tells us that faith is good for us - we live longer and enjoy life more. There so many evangelists for things that they think are good for us in life: diet; fitness; wellbeing - you can't shut them up! What we have to share is good for life and beyond it - and we shy away from the conversations.

So what has God trusted to you? What is your talent?

- ✦ If you don't do it you will lose it! Experience tells us that this is the case.
- ✦ If you do nurture your talent it becomes easier and then it becomes second nature - and then we become the people God has called us to be.