

Celebrate lack of skills

Matthew 25 (New International Version):

14 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them.

15 To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

16 The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more.

17 So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more.

18 But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.

20 The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'

21 "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!'

22 "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.'

23 "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!'

24 "Then the man who had received one bag of gold 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.

25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

26 "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?

27 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.

28 " "So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags.

29 For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.

30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

With this story Jesus wants us to be prepared for his second coming. For a long time I found this story quite confusing, especially the behavior of the third servant. Why did he dig a hole to hide his treasure? And moreover, why was he convinced that his master is "a hard man, harvesting where he have not sown and gathering where he has not scattered seed." This conclusion seems absolutely not logical because it was actually the same master who had also given the third servant one bag of gold. That was a fortune.

According to the New International Version one bag of gold was worth about 20 years of a laborer's wage.

So, how could the third servant even think that his master was stingy?

For me, this question is the real challenge in the story. If we could explain the conclusion of the third servant – that his master is a stingy, mean and a hard man – than we could explain also his behavior. The story doesn't reveal the answer, at least not in an explicit way. Thus, we have to ponder about the motivation of the third servant.

I don't know *your* conclusions. But this morning I will explain my own conclusion.

Imagine the course of the story. First, the master gives five bags of gold, then two and at the end one bag. If we could enter into this story: Which servant would you like to be? I myself would want to be the first one to get the most. I assume that some of you think the same as me. :-)

But what would we think if we were the last servant? Imagine the first one was receiving five bags and the second one two. And now it's up to you. You are standing before your master and are waiting. What do you expect? I myself would probably hope to receive perhaps three bags, or four, or more? But no! The master gave me only one bag. Only one! What is one bag in relation to two or five? It's only 50%. Or worse: only 20%.

Now we are at a point which I can relate to. Only by comparing with his colleagues, the third servant could come to the conclusion that his master is stingy and mean. Do you know such thoughts in your own life? I know them. It's called envy. Envy is a result of a comparison to our disadvantage.

Envy was the cause of the first murder in the world history. Cain killed Abel because of envy. And imagine, they were worshiping the Lord! Like the serpent could enter into paradise, so can envy enter even into times of worship, into our corps and services.

Envy is also the cause why devout men wanted to kill Jesus (Matthew 27,18; Mark 15,10).

Envy narrows our minds and thinking. Envy sees blessed people as a thread. But it is actually these blessed people who could help us to grow spiritually.

I also see an another lesson about envy in this story. The master gave every servant "according to their abilities". Obviously the third servant wasn't as gifted as his colleagues. That could be a reason for moaning. But it could also be a reason for celebrating. Because what we can't do, we don't need to do! That's a good thing.

God teaches us through nature that every kind of animal has its own talents. A lack of one particular skill emphasizes only the real skills. So, a lack of skills is a signpost to our real skills.

I want to summarize my thoughts with three statements:

1. Don't compare yourself with others. Instead, appreciate the great treasure that God has given you!
2. Envy highlights people who could teach you lessons that God has prepared for you.
3. Celebrate your lack of skills, because they are a signpost to your real skills.