

**1. Near the end of C. S. Lewis's "Chronicles of Narnia" Aslan the Lion takes Lucy, Edmund, Peter and everyone to the New Narnia--to what we would call "heaven" or the New Creation.**

It is a place of astonishing light and beauty; a place where every blade of grass seems to mean more and where every creature sings for the sheer joy of the Creator. It is a place where everything is just so *real* in depth and colour that the mere sight of a daisy takes your breath away simply because of the amazing beauty of it.

But then, in the midst of this picture of splendor, the children see a group of dwarves huddled together, convinced that they are sitting in the rank stench of a barn. A place so dark that they can't see their hands in front of their faces. The little girl, Lucy is so upset that the dwarves are not enjoying the New Narnia that she begs Aslan to help them to see.

Aslan replies, "Dearest Lucy, I will show you what I can do and what I cannot do." Aslan then shakes his golden mane and a sumptuous banquet instantly appears in front of the dwarves. Each dwarf is given a plate heaped with juicy meats, glistening vegetables, grains of the best rice you've ever eaten. Each also receives a goblet brimming with the finest wine anyone could ever imagine.

But when the dwarves dive in and begin eating, they start gagging and complaining. "That'd be right," they lament. "Not only are we in this stinking stable but now we've got to eat hay and dried cow dung as well!" When they sip the wine, they sputter, "And look at this now! Dirty water out of a donkey's trough!"

The dwarves, Aslan goes on to say, had chosen suspicion instead of trust and love. They were prisoners of their own minds. They *could* not see Aslan's gift of the New Narnia for the simple fact that they *would* not see it. What can Aslan do but leave them alone to the hell of their own devising?

Do you ever choose fear and suspicion over trust and love? What do you see when you look at the talents God has entrusted to you? Are you a bit like the dwarves seeing only flaws, faults and nothing of real use to God and His kingdom - or do you see massive opportunity all around you and the invitation to jump off the bank into God's flowing river of grace? Let's pray...

*Pray: Loving Father, thank you for the promise of the gospel at work in the lives of your servants. Unveil for us again today the wealth we carry around with us each moment. We pray for opportunities to give it away and share it in those places you've stationed us in this life. We pray that we would recognize the sheer magnitude of the grace and forgiveness you've shown to each one of us through your Son and His cross. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen!*

**2. The Bible tells us that each of the three servants in the parable received talents.**

A talent was a measure of weight. In this case it was a weighty amount of money which we would liken to a lifetimes' worth of cash or investments.

One servant received one talent – a weighty amount in its own right, another twice that amount and another five times as much as the first man. Two of the servants wasted no time putting their talents to work. The bible says that "immediately" they moved out and invested the talents they had received. They had some gusto, inspiration and joy as they moved out into the land of opportunity. In fact both doubled their money.

When the master returned he was thrilled and commended them. "Wonderful; Well done!" He went on to say to each of them "You are a good and faithful servant" and he put them in charge of even more and invited them to his celebration.

The third servant simply gave the master back what he'd initially received, every single coin. He excused himself from doing anything with the money because he had been afraid of losing it.

Then he blamed the master for expecting too much! He couldn't see that it was the generosity of the master that had given him the weighty sum in the first place.

He opted for fear and suspicion– like C.S. Lewis's dwarves; he couldn't see the opportunity for an adventure or even just having a go!

This servant tried to play it safe. Every last cent was accounted for, no less, but no more either. The master got stuck into him. "You're lazy and good for nothing!" he scolded and accused him of not at least putting the money in the bank to earn interest for him. He took away what he had been given and gave it to the one who now had 10 talents, and he threw "the worthless servant" out into the dark. *Was the master unfair doing this?*

### **3. God has given each one of you gifts.**

You might not think your gifts are worth much, but to God they're weighty gifts. Gifts that are more value to the people of Cairns / Tablelands than all the money in the world. They are gifts unique to you – the perfect fit according to the will of God who created and rescued you through Jesus and His cross – the weightiest gift of all.

But your talents, the gifts God has given to you and me are not all the same. The Holy Spirit gives different spiritual gifts to different Christians to build up the church and make Jesus known to the world. God does not expect the same from all of us because we are all different; but he does expect the same responsibility and the same faithfulness.

- One person makes beautiful casseroles for others;
- Some open their homes and share the gift of hospitality,
- Other people showing mercy and love for the sick,
- There are people who use their gifts working with children,
- Some use up front speaking gifts,
- Many prefer talking one on one with neighbours and friends,
- Some have been entrusted with wealth and use it to serve God and bless lives.
- There are those who have gifts with their hands and can repair and build things for others.
- Some understand computers and technology.

Making comparisons is useless in the church because we are all different in what we have to use for God. What we have in common is that all of us are called to invest in his kingdom with the gifts and abilities we've received.

### **4. The man punished was the man who did nothing, who would not even try.**

"I was afraid" he said as he buried the master's money. Fear about the master paralysed him from being creative and taking risks in using the money given to him.

When we are afraid we freeze, hold back, become inhibited and cautious and withdraw.

We don't venture very far. We are often so worried about own salvation we have little energy to think of others. We are happy if the church is there when we want it – as long as it doesn't ask too much of us...

Jesus story condemns those who want to keep things as they are – who want to play it safe, without commitment or risk.

***Having great news in the Gospel is fantastic - but if all we do is preserve it and not live it and give it away we are guilty of burying what God has entrusted to us.***

*"For God's sake use it or lose it!"* That's what Jesus parable says to us today. The unfaithful servant had his money taken away. Instead, Jesus saves, but not like us in banks!

Jesus saved people by giving himself to people and showing extravagant mercy and kindness. Churches that refuse to use the Gospel don't stay wherever they are, they usually die. They lose what they once had. There is a warning there for every church.

**5. When I read this parable I often struggle with the master's anger.**

At least he got his money back from the third servant. Didn't he go a bit over the top? How do you respond to the master's anger?

Jesus told this story not long before he went to the cross.

- The cross where he gave us everything he had.
- Where he invested his life in us.
- He made a "short term sacrifice for a long term gain" - our gain.
- Now he calls us to do the same.

In the light of the cross and Jesus' massive sacrifice for you and me, God's anger is justified when we refuse to take a few risks for him. When we play it safe because we've got our own interests in mind.

Maybe the question shouldn't be *"master how could you do this to the poor servant who only got 1 talent?"* but *"God how could we do so little with our gifts in response to your sacrifice for us on the cross?"*

God has given you life, health, abilities, money, forgiveness, faith, a place in his Kingdom. **Now use them!** Not in fear but freely - making short term sacrifices for the long term gain of God's kingdom like he did. Can you imagine how it would look standing before God saying *"I looked after myself, I kept your Gospel to myself too"* as if God should be happy with that!"

**Keeping the faith doesn't mean keeping it to ourselves.** Faithfulness is not keeping the status quo. Faithfulness is doing everything in your God given power with all we are and have to further God's business of proclaiming Jesus Christ as the saviour of the world.

God doesn't ask

- *"how many times did you sit in the pew last year?"* but *"what happened when you left the pew and went back into the world that week?"*
- Not *"was the budget met?"* but *"did each of you give generously to my mission in the world from what I entrusted to you?"*
- Not *"were you on a committee?"* but *"did you use your gifts as a witness to me this year?"*
- Not *"how many new members have you gained"* but *'were each of you taking opportunities to share Christ's love and forgiveness and good news with someone this year?'*

I can picture a fourth servant in Jesus parable - one who wheels and deals and takes chances but loses the lot. What would the master do?

What would God do with a Christian who shared their faith and used their gifts and invested their life in others without fear, yet had little to show for it? If I know the mind of God from this story he would say "well done, you had a go!

*"For God's sake use it or lose it!"*

Amen.