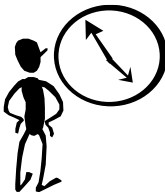


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
(every other week)	

Wednesday:

Bible Study	6:30 p. m.
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Like All the Nations

By Tom Thornhill Jr.

As you study the history of a nation (or anything for that matter) you will notice key decisions and actions that have a profound impact on shaping what it would become. America is certainly that way. There are key events and decisions that have made us what we are as a nation, including wars that we have been involved in, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the ratification of various amendments to the Constitution (such as the 13th amendment which abolished slavery and the 15th and 19th amendments which made voting available to all adults, and key judicial decision (such as Roe vs. Wade in 1973 which legalized abortion and the removal of any mentioning of God in various places). We are who we are, both good and bad, because of history-making decisions.

In the Bible, Israel is no different. As you study their history in the Old Testament you find there were landmark decisions they made which shaped what they would become. One such occasion is found in I Samuel 8 where Israel turns to Samuel and demands, “*God give us a king to judge us.*” Samuel, as God’s servant, tries to discourage them by warning them what would happen if they had a king. They reject his warnings and demand, “*No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles*” (I Samuel 8:6, 10-18, 19-20). What a tragedy. In demanding a king they rejected God’s theocracy and began on a path that led them further and further away from God.

Why did they demand a king? As I Samuel 8:20 says, they wanted to be “*like all the nations*” around them. In other words, they wanted to be like everybody else and act like everybody else. They did not want to be different. Their desires

were granted and sadly, Israel became like all the other nations with a king and all the ungodly corruption that their idolatrous neighbors participated in. As I study their history and decline I find this to be one of their crucial decisions, which led to their eventual rejection by God and the fall of both Israel and Judah. Truly we ought to heed the warning, Be careful what you ask for!

Christians are to be different. If we are to be pleasing to God, we need to avoid the desire to be like everyone else. In Titus 2:14 Christians are God's "*own special people*." The King James Version uses the word "peculiar" which in Greek means, "that which is one's own, belongs to one's possession" (Thayer). The point is that we belong to God and act to please Him instead of men. Peter warned that our conduct will cause others to "think it strange" that we do not run with them (I Peter 4:4), especially those who knew us before we became Christians. In I Peter 4:12 Peter warned that as a result of your conduct, you will experience fiery trials because of the way you stand out. Paul described our lives as a light that shines "*in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation*" (Philippians 2:15). Moses was commended because he, "by faith," when he became of age refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin for a season (Hebrews 11:24-26).

Yes, there are many Christians who desire to be popular that will compromise their peculiarity. They want to be like everyone else so they put their light under a bushel. Sadly, their desire for acceptance among the worldly usually leads them to eventually reject God. They will sell their soul for a brief moment of gratification. A particularly disturbing example of this that I have observed is among the young within some (not all) congregations. I have seen those who are popular in the world belittle, tease, and alienate their Christian peers because they act differently. They don't wear the latest styles and they don't do the ungodly, worldly things, so they are mocked by supposed brethren. The parents of these ridiculed children struggle to encourage them to keep doing what is right and not to worry about the way the world treats them. Sadly, when the parents speak of the world, they are including some who are supposed to be brethren. It is one thing for a young Christian to put up with teasing and rejection at school, but it should never happen when they are among fellow Christians. Parents who allow their children to act that way ought to be ashamed of themselves because they are encouraging their children to be "*like the nations around us*" and causing great damage to the future of the local church.

Like Christians, many churches have adopted a desire to be "*like the nations around us*." Over the past century, we have seen both the denominational world and some churches of Christ become more worldly. Denominations are now involved in things that a few decades ago would have been shunned with almost complete unity by the religious world. Now, in an attempt to be accepted, more and more churches (not all)

are lowering standards, choosing to ignore subjects like homosexuality, sinful divorce and remarriage, and numerous recreational and political activities that are without any authority in God's word, thus changing the focus of the church. Their desire is more to be accepted by the world than by the Lord. So, rather than trying to change the world by being peculiar, they adopt the standards of the world. The sad thing is that history is destined to repeat itself and things will get worse and worse.

A good example of this is to consider music in worship. In the late 1800s, the Lord's church was divided over the use of instrumental music and missionary societies. It started with a simple melodeon (a type of organ) introduced into the worship service. But look at where music in worship is today. Some Christian churches now incorporate complete bands and choirs into their "worship services." Particularly disturbing is the use of various forms of "Christian" music including Christian rock, heavy metal, rap, punk, country alternative, and you name it. Just like Israel of old, there is a desire to be "like the nations around us." And like Israel of old, they have left God out of the picture and become more like the world. And some "churches of Christ" are not far behind as they are attempting to "upgrade" their worship services with everything but instrumental music (and some have added that). But mark my words, with time this will change.

This article is written so we may see the problem with desiring to be "*like the nations around us.*" If we do not restrain ourselves we will get our wish. "*Adulterers and adulteress! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend with the world makes himself an enemy of God*" (James 4:4). Heed the warning of Jesus. "*No one can serve two masters; For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other; You cannot serve God and mammon*" (Matthew 6:24). Are you striving to be more like the world or like Jesus? The choice you make will make an impact on your eternity.

Using Our God-Given Abilities

By Bret Miller

In Matthew 24, Jesus is asked about the signs of the end of the age. Jesus then spoke for a long time on many different subjects, answering what the kingdom of heaven would be like in the end. One of those descriptions involved one master and three servants. In the parable of the talents, the master gave each servant a certain amount of money according to his ability. To one the master gave five talents, another two, and another one talent. There is some speculation over the value of this particular form of currency. From what I have briefly researched, one talent of silver could be worth nearly twenty years of income. Whatever the case, the amount of money with which the master entrusts each servant is quite remarkable, especially considering the fact that the master then ups and leaves for a long time. If you know the story, you know that the five-talent and two-talent servants both got to work to make the money grow, whereas

the one-talent servant just hid his in the ground for safekeeping. The text says that each was given talents according to his ability, so the number of talents is representative of each slave's ability.

Eventually, the master returns and he sees that the five-talent and two-talent servants have both doubled the money given to them. The master rewards them both equally, saying, "*Well done, my good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a few things, but I will put you in charge of many. Enter into the joy of your master.*" Meanwhile, the one-talent man is probably wondering how he is going to pass this assignment. He has done nothing except hide his talent in the ground, and the master tells him that he is wicked and lazy for it. The one-talent man is thrown by the master outside into the darkness.

Do the talents just represent ability? If so, is our application really just to make ourselves more talented? Can the talents represent souls or perhaps good deeds? However we interpret the meaning behind the talents, whether it be the ones God gives or what we produce, I think we can safely say that God gives us talent and we are to use that talent for good. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus tells us not to hide our light but to let it shine to bring glory to our Father in heaven. What are we doing with what God gives us?

Why does the one-talent man hide his money? The man claims he did it out of fear. The master calls him wicked and lazy. Is the master Jesus? If so, does Jesus gather where he does not sow or scatter? Rather, the wicked and lazy servant had no relationship with his master to know that he was a good master. The servant claims that the master was too difficult, that he was a hard man, and that he feared him. But I think the master calls him out on it and basically says, "Oh, so I'm a hard man? Well, if that is the case, you would have at least done the bare minimum to please me." (Matthew 25:26-27 NIBMV- Not Inspired Bret Miller Version). To go along with this point, as the reader, who do you think we are supposed to trust? The unfaithful man or the master who gives so generously? Matthew 25:28-29 has always bothered me. I think that God taking from someone who doesn't have much and giving it to someone who already has plenty seems a bit backward. So how are we to understand what the master is saying here? I think the main message is that great faithfulness yields great reward. And I have peace of mind knowing that God is a perfect judge.

Applications:

- You can't change what you start with, but you can change what you end with. I teach a leadership class for high school students, and I am handed a curriculum to teach. For a couple of weeks, we talked about the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. The idea is that you are more successful if — when you face challenges and fail — you keep trying and change your mindset to say, "I can't

do this yet.” This brings some good results and there’s data to back it up. I think it’s a good mindset to a certain extent. At the risk of sounding like I have a fixed mindset, I can confidently say, “I am not good enough to play in the NBA.” Adding “yet” to that statement does absolutely no good. I have not been given the talent to do so. This is not an excuse, this is reality. In life, we’ve been given talents, but we have ceilings in certain areas. If the one-talent man works just as hard as the five-talent man, he will never catch up. I’m not saying that to discourage anyone but to help us understand the reality of the situation. We all have different abilities/gifts given by God and they’re all important.

- To view everyone as having equal talents/abilities/gifts is inaccurate and, I think, detrimental to knowing how we can view and help other people. You may be a two-talent or a five-talent individual. Encourage the one-talent. I Thessalonians 5:14 says to “*encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*”
- Don’t think because you’re doing the work of a one-talent man that you’re living up to your potential. We’re not working against each other, we’re working for the master. Stop comparing yourself to other talents and serve the master.
- At times the world says it is shameful to be submissive to or to serve other people. But the slaves served the master. We are to be slaves of righteousness, not sin. Don’t be afraid to call yourself a bondservant of God.
- Many people might see the one-talent man as justified because he was given something and gave the exact same thing back. This is typical of the “I’m ok you’re ok, don’t bother me if I’m doing nothing. Let me live my life my way,” mentality. This is not acceptable in the kingdom of heaven.
- Both the five-talent and two-talent man did not procrastinate in doing the master’s (God’s) work. When God speaks, the faithful obey immediately. You don’t know when Jesus is coming back, so get to work.
- Don’t be like the one-talent man and re-work in your mind the nature of God to fit your liking or to use it as an excuse for apathy.
- When we consider the value of a talent, even the one-talent man still received a lot of money/talent. You’re capable of quite a bit with what God gives you.
- Too often, we compare ourselves to other people with jealousy in our hearts instead of appreciating just how much we’ve been given.
- I see the grace of God by entrusting so much to people who are equivalent to slaves. Our status is completely different in comparison to God, but he expects us to be faithful.
- Being “*faithful over a little*” (when “a little” is at least a hundred years of income for the five-talent man) doesn’t seem like “a little,” but it illustrates how much God gives us as our reward. How great that reward must be!