

The parable of the talents is not entirely what it appears to be. Like all of Jesus' parables, it is a metaphor. It is a story, an image, a scenario which points to something beyond itself.

The talent was in fact money that was used all around the Roman Empire and the countries that Rome occupied – and it was the most valuable coinage of the time. It was a silver coin and it was equal to 6000 denarii; since one denarius was the average day's wage for a labourer, one single talent was equal to fifteen years wages. A fantastic sum – and it seems that Jesus is exaggerating to make his point. He was exaggerating his point to make it clear that he wasn't talking about money at all. In English, it's easier to see this, because 'talent' means a person gift or skill or attribute. It comes from two words in Greek: i) *talanton* – which was a balance or a scale for weighing money; and ii) *daimon* – which means genius.

I've seen an American evangelical website that says if we invest our money with trust in God, he will double or triple it for us. This is called the 'prosperity gospel' – and it is as offensive as it sounds.

Jesus, as always, was talking about the inner person: not about the money he might or might not have, but the interior graces God has blessed us with – because these are what endure. They make us who we are. And this parable makes it clear that they have been given to us for us to use – particularly in the service of others: compassion, kindness, acceptance, affirmation, forgiveness, mercy. These are infectious – they spread –

they increase. St John of the Cross said: 'Where you find no love, pour love in, and soon you will draw love out.' This is the way our inward talents are meant to be used – in the parable. It's what the servant means when he says: 'Sir, you entrusted me with two talents; here are two more that I have made'. To increase and magnify and make them powerful by using them in love.

If they are not used, if our heart does not provide rich soil for them, they will wither and die within us. This is what the master means when he says: '... even what he has will be taken away.'