

THE DANGER OF SMALLNESS
Mt 25:24-30
Liptovský Hrádok, 29th May 2016

Mt 25:24-30 προσελθὼν δὲ καὶ ὁ τὸ ἐν τάλαντον εἰληφὼς εἶπεν· κύριε, ἔγνωσα σε ὅτι σκληρὸς εἶ ἄνθρωπος, θερίζων ὅπου οὐκ ἔσπειρας καὶ συνάγων ὅθεν οὐ διεσκόρπισας, ²⁵ καὶ φοβηθεὶς ἀπελθὼν ἔκρυψα τὸ τάλαντόν σου ἐν τῇ γῆ· ἴδε ἔχεις τὸ σόν. ²⁶ ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· πονηρὸν δοῦλε καὶ ὀκνηρὸν, ἦδεις ὅτι θερίζω ὅπου οὐκ ἔσπειρα καὶ συνάγω ὅθεν οὐ διεσκόρπισα; ²⁷ ἔδει σε οὖν βαλεῖν τὰ ἀργύριά μου τοῖς τραπεζίταις, καὶ ἐλθὼν ἐγὼ ἔκομισάμην ἂν τὸ ἐμὸν σὺν τόκῳ. ²⁸ ἄρατε οὖν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τὸ τάλαντον καὶ δότε τῷ ἔχοντι τὰ δέκα τάλαντα. ²⁹ τῷ γὰρ ἔχοντι παντὶ δοθήσεται καὶ περισσευθήσεται, τοῦ δὲ μὴ ἔχοντος καὶ ὃ ἔχει ἀρθήσεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ. ³⁰ καὶ τὸν ἀχρεῖον δοῦλον ἐκβάλετε εἰς τὸ σκοτὸς τὸ ἐξώτερον· ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων.

Mt 25:24-30 ²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' ²⁶ But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Heb 10:37-38 ἔτι γὰρ μικρὸν ὅσον ὅσον, ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἤξει καὶ οὐ χρονίσει. ³⁸ ὁ δὲ δίκαιός μου ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται, καὶ ἐὰν ὑποστείληται, οὐκ εὐδοκεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἐν αὐτῷ.

Heb 10:37-38 For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; ³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him."

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0. INTRODUCTION: FEELING SMALL

0.1. A MODERN PROBLEM

- availability of the highest quality music, video, sermons etc. → paralysis of amateur music, art etc.
- Internet → new significance of an individual (blogs, videos...) → anything goes

- → too many voices (“Blogs have become so dizzyingly infinite that they've undermined our sense of what is true and what is false, what is real and what is imaginary”¹)
- → easy availability of the best works

0.2. SMALL IN THE BIBLE

0.2.1. POSITIVE

- **Amos 7:2** locusts ... "O Lord GOD, please forgive! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!"
- **Amos 7:4-5** ... a judgment by fire, ...⁵ Then I said, "O Lord GOD, please cease! How can Jacob stand? He is so small!" ... **Amos 7:8** "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass by them;"²
- **Jer 42:2** and said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Let our plea for mercy come before you, and pray to the LORD your God for us, for all this remnant – because we are left with but a few, as your eyes see us..."
- **Zech 4:10** For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel
- **Rev 3:8** I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

0.2.2. NEGATIVE

- **Obadiah 1:2** I will make you small among the nations; you shall be utterly despised.
- **Song 2:15** Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom."

1. EXCUSES FOR INACTION

1.1. REAL BELIEF OR JUST A SMOKE SCREEN?

1.1.1. "TOO INSIGNIFICANT"

- 1Cor 12 – “My role is neglectable”; “No-one takes notice of me → nothing will be missing without me”;
- offended; hurt; comparing... **1Sa 18:8** And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, "They have ascribed to **David** ten **thousands**, and to me they have ascribed **thousands**, and what more can he have but the kingdom?"

1.1.2. "CAREFUL", CAUTIOUS

- **Pr 14:16** One who is wise is cautious (⚠️) and turns away from evil, but a fool is reckless and careless.
- **Pr 22:13** The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!" "Lazy people are wise in their own eyes, even more than seven who respond with discernment. (26:13–16)"³

Real difficulties in the way of heaven exercise faith. And such there are, far too great for those who have never “counted the cost”; or who “go to the warfare at any time at their own charges”. But imaginary difficulties are the indulgence of sloth. *The slothful man is a coward. He has no love for his work, and therefore he is always ready to put a cheat upon his soul, inventing some vain excuse, because he will not do his duty. He shrinks from every work likely to involve trouble. Fancied dangers frighten him from real and present duties. There is a lion without; I shall be slain in the streets an absurd excuse as if public streets except in special cases were the haunts of wild beasts. He is afraid of being slain without, when he willingly gives himself up to be slain within.* Thus the unbelieving spies when holding up to view the exuberant fruit of Canaan, added “But we be not able to go up against the people. The cities are walled up to heaven and the giants are there”. As if the promise of God was not a stronger ground of faith than the giants of fear! But much more sad is it to see Moses shrinking nay Jonah...⁴

1.2. AGAINST EXCUSES

- **Mt 25:29** For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.
- **Rev 3:8** "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

¹ KEEN, A. *The Cult of the Amateur*, New York : Doubleday, 2007, p. 3.

² The expression must mean that the Lord is no longer going to pass by Israel with his judgment (see 7:1–6); instead he is going to visit them with it. (GLENNY, p. 127)

³ TREMPER LONGMAN III, *Proverbs*, Grand Rapids : Baker, 2006.

⁴ BRIDGES, C. *Proverbs*, New York : Robert Carter & Brothers, 1865, p. 347

- Take a positive view of your gifts and your opportunities...
- **Mt 10:42** whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.
 - [Francis of Sales] "Ah! God preserve us from those imaginary fervours, which very often breed a vain and secret self-esteem in the bottom of our hearts. Great works lie not always in our way, but every moment we may do little ones with excellence..."⁵
- **Heb 10:37-38** For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; ³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him."

2. PARALYSIS OF FAITH

2.1. FAITH AND EMOTIONS

- faith & mind (theology; worldview...)
- faith & feelings (self-perception; temperament)

[SEAMANDS] What are some of these damaged emotions? One of the most common is a deep *sense of unworthiness*, a continuous feeling of anxiety, inadequacy, and inferiority, an inner nagging that says, "I'm no good. I'll never amount to anything. No one could ever possibly love me. Everything I do is wrong."⁶

2.1.1. FEAR (OF GOD?)

- **2Cor 7:1** ...bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God
- → fear of taking action; fear of failure; fear of rejection;
- Fear *more* inaction than failure! (the audience of ONE!)
 - **Gn 17:1** When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless..."

2.1.2. SHYNESS (PRIDE?)

- too great expectations (applause), sensitiveness (no criticism; perfectionism)
- **1Sa 10:21-22** [Saul] But when they sought him, he could not be found. ²² So they inquired again of the LORD, "Is there a man still to come?" and the LORD said, "Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage."

2.2. AGAINST THE PARALYSIS OF FAITH

- Stop judging! (self and others) → **1Cor 4:3** it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself
- **1John 4:19** **We love because** he first loved us.
- **Rom 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus
- **Mk 8:38** For **whoever** is **ashamed** of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.
- **2Cor 4:13** "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak,

3. FLAWED THEOLOGY

3.1. THE IMAGE OF GOD

3.1.1. GOD'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD

- Detached and uninvolved
- **1John 5:19** We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.
- **Is 6:3** "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

3.1.2. GOD'S RELATIONSHIP TO MEN

- Strict and demanding
- **Is 26:12** O LORD, you will ordain peace for us; you have done for us all our works
- **Eph 2:10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

⁵ FRANCIS OF SALES *Treatise on the Love of God XII/6*.

⁶ SEAMANDS, D. A. *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, 1981.

3.2. AGAINST THE FLAWED IMAGE OF GOD

- **Rom 11:22** Note then the kindness and the severity of God (ἴδε οὖν χρηστότητα καὶ ἀποτομίαν θεοῦ)
- **Jer 9:24** ...but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness (יְצַדִּיק וְיִצְרָקָה) in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."
- **Phil 2:13** for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

4. TO REMEMBER

- Feeling small can be humility but it is unbelief or laziness if it an excuse for inaction.
- Emotions are powerful inhibitors of faith. Healing is in the stronger emotion experiencing God's love.
- The purely theoretical image of God is always flawed. You must experience God in practice to know his relation to the world and to humanity.