

Series: Key Moments

February 22, 2015

Title: End Game

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Text: Matthew 25:14-30

A Question of Talent and Time

Who's the best?

Who is the best wide receiver ever in the NFL? It's the kind of thing guys can argue about all night long. But sooner or later at least two names are going to come up for consideration: Randy Moss and Jerry Rice.

Ask Randy Moss and he won't mind telling you his opinion:

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"I really do think that I'm the greatest receiver to ever play this game." (as quoted in footballnation.com February 1,2013)

Ask Jerry Rice, and he will agree that Randy Moss was no doubt the *most talented* person to ever play the position. But then he goes on to say:

"He could have been one of the greatest if he had worked just a little bit harder," Rice said. "I don't think he wanted to give it 100 percent. You never knew what you were going to get with Randy. Sometimes you'd get the unbelievable guy, the amazing guy. Other times you'd get the guy that took a couple plays off." (footballnation.com)

The greatest *talent*? The honors go to Randy Moss.

The greatest *player*? The honors go – hands down – to Jerry Rice. Why? Because even though he didn't have all of the talent of a Randy Moss, he was willing to do whatever it took, every game and every play, to excel. And that made all the difference.

Talents:

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The word 'talent' is a Greek word that originally described a very large sum of money. In Jesus' day, a talent was worth 6000 days' work. In today's numbers, that would work out to

almost half a million dollars for a worker who earned \$9.00 per hour. Kings and the super-rich measured their fortunes in talents.

One day Jesus told a story about talents – a story befitting a sports-bar argument over the merits of a Randy Moss and Jerry Rice. His story begins like this:

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Matthew 25:14-15 NIV

“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.”

Each bag of gold weighed one talent. In other words, each servant was entrusted with a small fortune. And each servant was responsible to make something good happen with that fortune. Each of them would now have the chance to show what they could do with the chance of a lifetime.

A Question of Talent and Time:

This little story is a story about talents and time. Each of the servants received not one, but *two* gifts. First, each of them was entrusted with a vast sum of money that they were to invest for their master. But they were also given a long period of time to work with. The master left them on their own with his fortune, trusting them to make the right decisions and to work with all of their might to maximize his investment in them.

You can no doubt see where Jesus is going with this story. He is reminding us that, like the man in the story, He would be leaving His followers to do His work in the world. He would be empowering them for that work, investing His very Spirit in them. They would be given the work of the Kingdom – each according to their ability.

Jesus has made that same investment in you and me. He has given us talents and time.

The Accounting

In the master’s absence:

So what did the three servants do with the fortunes that had been entrusted to them? How did they use the time between the master’s departure and his return?

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Matthew 25:16-18 NIV

“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.”

Two of the servants made the most of the opportunity, in each case doubling the owner’s investment. They used both the talents and the time to the best advantage. The other never bothered to put the money to work. Instead, he simply hid it in the ground. He buried the talent and squandered the time.

Faithful servants:

The day finally came when the master returned. There was no more time to work on investing the money. Now was the time for accounting:

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Matthew 25:19-23 NIV

“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!’

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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!’

In both cases, the master was more than pleased with how the servants had used his provision of talents and time. They were “good and faithful” servants: good of heart and faithful with the use of his wealth.

The other servant:

So what about the third servant, the one who buried the talent that was entrusted to him?

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Matthew 25:24-25 NIV

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.’

Instead of coming to the master with a healthy return on his investment, all this servant had to offer were lame excuses and veiled accusations. He had been entrusted with a talent and plenty of time to turn it into two talents. But instead of maximizing the opportunity, he had copped an attitude. Listen to how the master responded:

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Matthew 25:26-27 NIV

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.’”

The master hits the nail on the head. Instead of being “good and faithful,” this man has turned out to be “wicked and lazy.” He had a bad attitude – holding a grudge against his employer because of the employer’s wealth and power. And he was lazy – taking the route of passive-aggressive behavior by burying the talent.

We see it all the time.

There’s the athlete who always has an excuse as to why he or she didn’t perform well on a given day. “They didn’t throw the ball to me often enough.” “The coach just doesn’t like me.” “I deserve a bigger salary.”

There’s the employee forever offended that a promotion didn’t come his way. Now he does his job – just barely. He puts in his 40 hours; not a minute more. But every conversation with him is filled with bitterness and resentment. He has copped an attitude that robs him of investing his talents and time.

How easy it is to be blind to the incredible opportunities that God has entrusted to us! What a tragedy it is when we simply “mark time,” instead of making the most of the day God has given to us. What a tragedy to compare ourselves with others and feel inferior or resentful toward those who seem to have been entrusted with more! What a tragedy to bury what God has given to us and doubt His love.

End Game

Maximum investment:

At the end of the story, the master strips the wicked servant of the talent that had been entrusted to him:

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Matthew 25:28-30 NIV

“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.”

The master makes the only decision a wise investor could make: he reinvests the one talent by entrusting it to his highest performer. In fact, both of the good servants are given much greater responsibilities. But for the wicked servant, it’s “game over.” He will get no more opportunities.

An open-ended story:

Did you notice how the conclusion of this story is actually “open-ended”? At the end of the story the two faithful servants have been given bigger portfolios. They were faithful with a relatively small fortune; now they are entrusted with a much larger one.

If you think of this story in terms of Jesus being the Master who leaves and comes back, then this open-ended story has something very powerful to say about the importance of what we do with our talents and time *not just in this life, but in God’s future Kingdom!*

The End Game is not simply finishing this life and hoping we somehow got things right. What we do *in this life* carries over into the world to come. This life is an investment in God’s New Creation, both now and in the future. As Paul reminds us:

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1 Corinthians 15:58 NIV

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

End Game:

Randy Moss no doubt wanted to be remembered as the greatest wide receiver to ever play in the NFL. He didn’t mind telling you that he was the very best. And he certainly had the talent to make it happen. So what went wrong? Why do people see him as an example of

unrealized potential? Could it be that, like the wicked servant in the parable, he buried his talent?

Oh, he put on the uniform and ran out on the field. He played for a number of teams and made some astonishing catches. But he didn't do so consistently. He didn't give 100%. He wasn't 100% a team player. Each game, each play marked a diminishing amount of time for him to maximize his talents and make his mark on the game. He let the time slip away.

I have an old box of slides that I took on a trip with my dad to Mystic Seaport. As a teen I became fascinated with sailing vessels of all shapes and sizes. What better place to see lots of old boats than Mystic Seaport? It was a rainy day in May when my dad drove me up from New Jersey. We wandered around the museum all day long; we had the place almost entirely to ourselves. My dad didn't have a "talent" to offer me when it came to boats. But he did offer the gift of his time, even if it meant standing around in the rain while I framed up picture after picture. In the end, the picture that matters the most to me is one I took of my dad with rain dripping off his hat.

So, what's your "end game"? Are you investing time and talents for more than what you can see in front of you right now? If Jesus were to return or call you home right now, what kind of account would you give?

The good news is that whatever we have done or failed to do in the past, we can invest our time and talents in God's Kingdom starting right now. And remember, the reward for that investment outlives this entire world. What we do for God in this life not only builds His Kingdom now, but becomes a part of His future blessings forever.

So, if your talent is buried, it's time to dig it up! Time's awasting.